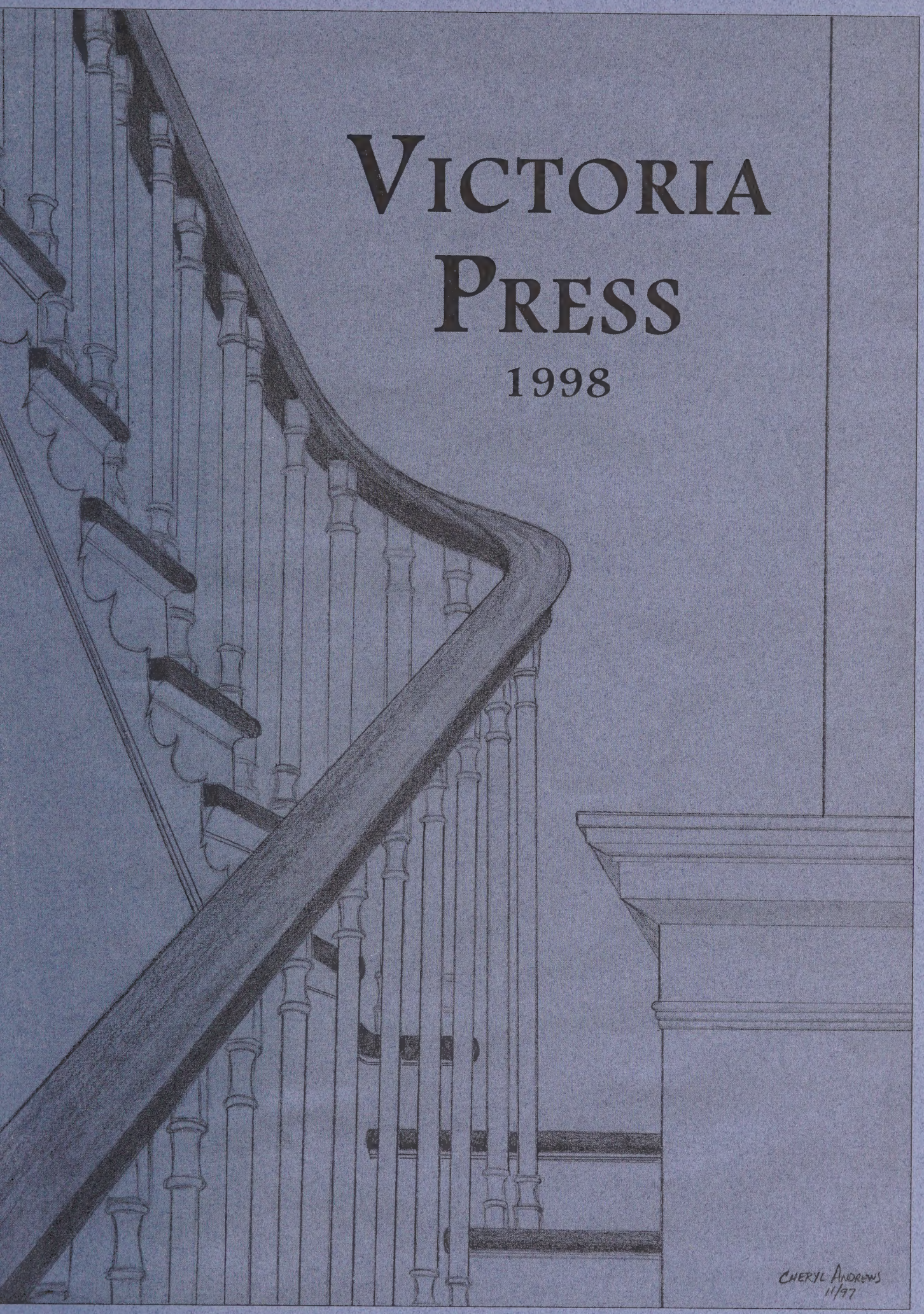

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Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College

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FOURTH ISSUE

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Cover drawing by Cheryl Andrews of the stairway in the Magnolia Building.

Watercolor by Annie Cicale

The following selections are taken, with permission, from *Explorations*, a book of essays/explorations of Wilma Dykeman's multi-faceted life: from here to China, from past to present, from joy to grief.

In this essay written shortly after his death, Ms. Dykeman tells of meeting her husband, James Stokely, and pays tribute to him and their life together as "a couple...destined for each other." "The Mate" is by James Stokely.

Excerpted from *Explorations*

Wilma Dykeman

"Midway this way of life we're bound upon
I woke to find myself in a dark wood,
Where the right road was wholly lost and gone."

That dark wood of which Dante wrote awaits each of us. Sometimes it presents itself on a sunny summer afternoon. Before we even know the invitation has been issued the darkness gathers and we grope toward an ancient exploration.

Down, down into ourselves we go like a lost wanderer knowing no path through the woods, finding no light to illuminate the lonely way. We discover a self and a suffering whose existence is stranger than far countries or lost rivers.

No matter what age we may be by the calendar when the dark wood closes in, the moment comes at mid-life. Life on either side of the woods will never seem or be the same again.

Thus, within the space of an hour on a late June afternoon, I came into the dark woods.

I must tell of the beginning if the end is to have meaning.

On a Sunday morning in a long-ago-August Thomas Wolfe's sister brought a stranger to my house.

Thomas Wolfe was a big, exuberant writer who wanted to bring all of America into the grand design of his fiction. Mable Wolfe was a big, exuberant woman who wanted to bring all of her friends together in the generous embrace of her hospitality. And so, she came with the young stranger from Tennessee, unannounced, early one Sunday morning while I was in the flower garden cutting a fresh bouquet before the dew disappeared.

I had a brand new degree from Northwestern University and the contract for a career to begin in New York in September.

But as my visitor and I talked—that day, and that evening, and the next day, and the next—we discovered that we were both interested in words and in woods, in theater and in

thought, in being very social on some occasions and very much alone on other occasions. We were passionately fond of travel, and equally happy in staying at home. We liked the mountains and people up the little coves and hollows, and we also wanted to see deserts and cities and people who were in places of power and fame. Many of the things that made us perplexing to other people made us seem clear and right to each other.

From August to October was only a breath of time. Yet it was a lifetime. The contract and New York and September washed away in a misty haze. And on a brilliant blue autumn day, October 12, in the garden where I had been picking summer flowers, surrounded by banks of flaming leaves brought from the woods and baskets of great richly-colored dahlias and chrysanthemums, Mabel Wolfe's friend and I were married. And just to live up to the spirit of Thomas Wolfe, we took a wedding trip across America, from October 12 to December 20—seeking to know our native land.

We remained married—to each other—for thirty-seven years. I pity those who will never know such a long and good togetherness. It was not easily achieved. Courage, effort, generosity, humor, determination went into those years. The result was love.

Then, on an afternoon in June, sun-tanned and smiling, suddenly he sank onto the grass beside his garden and was dead.

The world was changed. For a few people on this mysterious planet nothing will be the same again. Yes, the oak outside the window will stand, the garden will bear, summer will flourish and wane, other lives will continue their familiar routine—but all diminished because he is not here. And I shall continue, too, diminished by his absence, but better than I could ever have been without his presence for a little while.

We met in a garden and we parted in a garden. I was picking flowers in my mother's garden in Asheville on that summer morning when we met. He wore a white shirt, open at the collar with rolled-up sleeves, against which his smooth skin was a golden tan and his eyes were the clear blue of sea or sky, and before that day was finished he had asked me if I liked books and the woods and the final question— Beethoven. Two weeks later I canceled my career in New York. In October we were married. I believe there never was a couple more destined for each other.

Very few people knew the true dimensions of James' life. In a world where outer appearances are judged as reality he invested more and more of his time in inner riches. In a time when bigger is considered best and power seems a prize worth any sacrifice, he cherished the fragile spirit, the delicate creativity that flows from an eternal power. In a period when the loud and the self-proclaiming receive the world's awards, he was quiet and self-forgetful.

He was also a person of immense power. With all his gentleness he was capable of deep anger. Anger against injustice—injustice in any form or dimension— led him into some lonely valleys. He never talked of those experiences because he had no martyr's complex—too much laughter to be a martyr. And when his family or friends or society caught up with his farsighted vision, he never suggested an attitude of "I-told-you-so." He was too busy looking ahead to other horizons. In all his patience he seethed with powerful impatience. Impatience with trivia—the second-rate in our cultural, spiritual, educational, political, industrial,

individual and social lives—led him to some lonely pinnacles. This grieved him because any riches of mind or spirit or body that he discovered he wanted to share with everyone else. And every day was an adventure of discovery for him.

I never met anyone who savored more deeply the potential of the moment. Whether we were in a strange land or here in our own familiar mountains, whether we were listening to the first katydids of summer or the Eroica Symphony, whether we were among exciting famous people or talking with old-timers or were alone together. To whatever we were doing he brought full appreciation, passion, imagination.

People sometimes asked if he was disconcerted by my writing, my career. How little they knew him! He had no identity crisis, no need to narrow anyone else's life to enhance his own. Indeed, one of the purposes of his life seemed to be to make sure that everyone—no matter race or sex, social status or creed—should have not only opportunity but encouragement to be not only good but best.

And he was the best. Funny and sad, uniquely innocent and infinitely sophisticated, he balanced the world of nature and the world of books and dwelt in a realm of special goodness. He would not have liked that word, it would embarrass him. But he was good. We shall rarely see his like again.

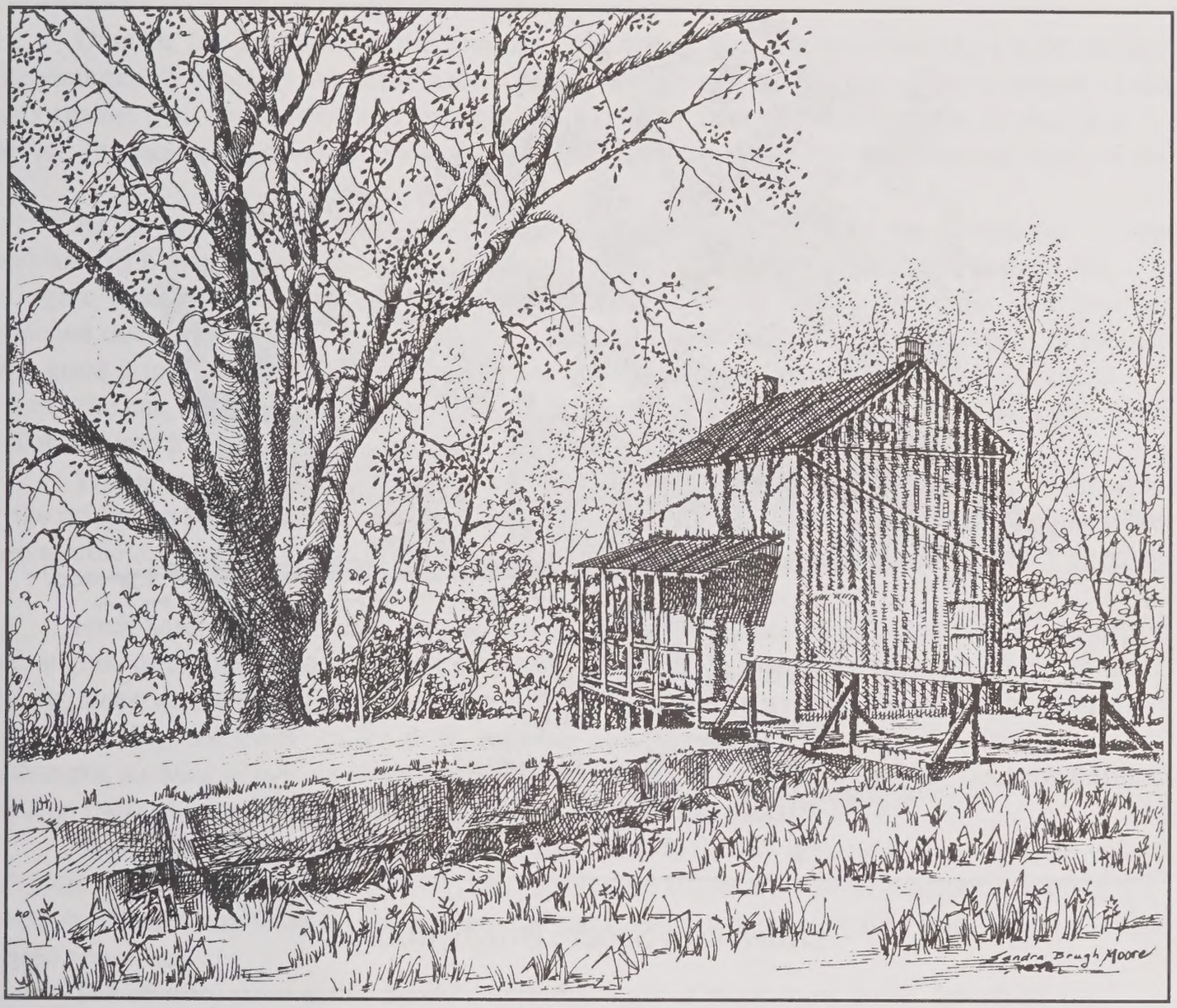
A week ago he left on one of the few journeys we have not taken together. But he is not wholly away—and I am not wholly here. We are still together.

• • •

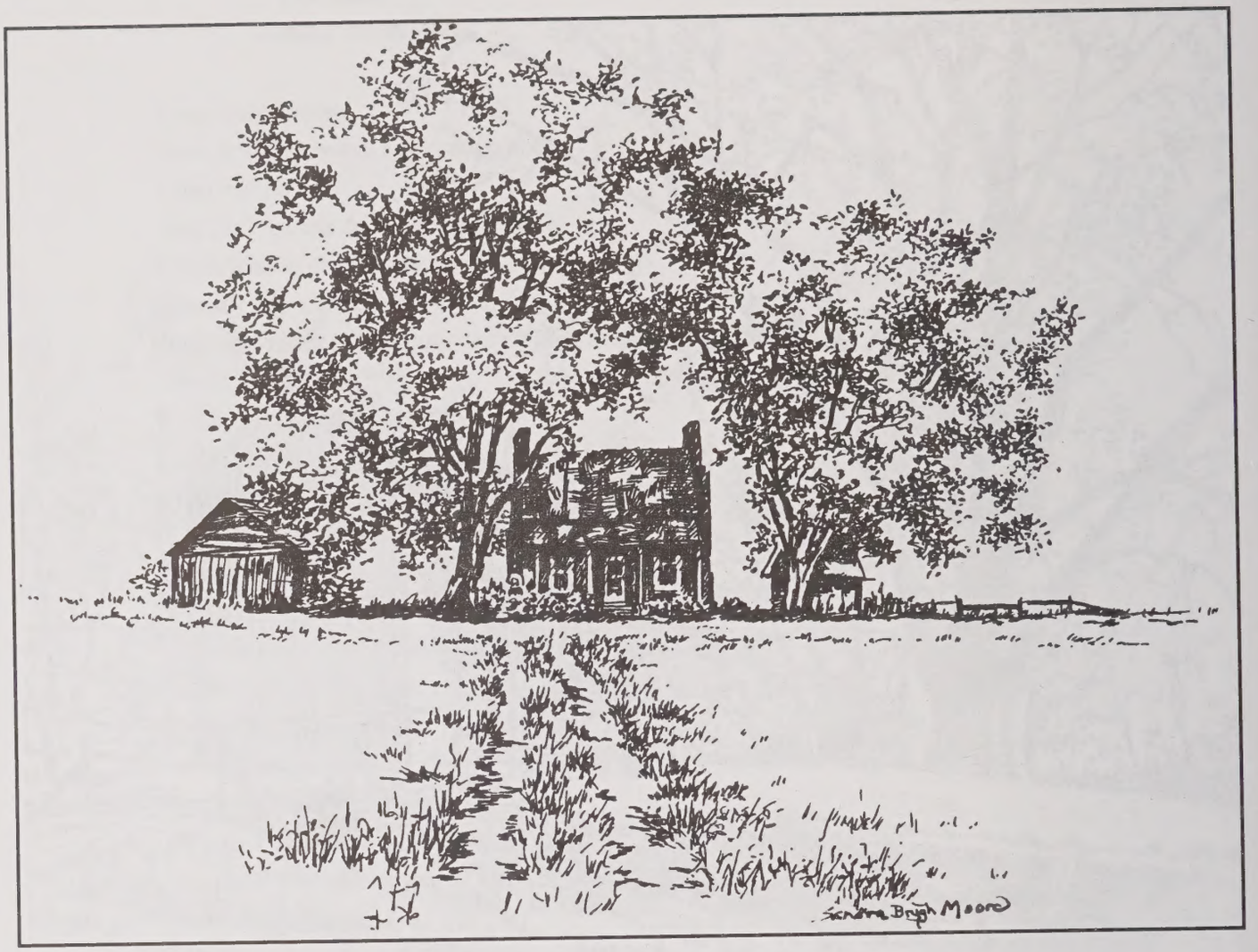
He left me a very special legacy, one that only he could have created. He explored a simple incident and made it into a metaphor for death and killing, life and love. I share his gift with you.

The Mate
James Stokely

I was only sixteen
And sat trying not to cry in the woods.
I had had no luck
And the October sun was nearly gone.
Uncle Rance, over to my right,
Already had a dozen partridges,
And Lute McSween, a quarter of a mile to the left,
A brace of ducks.
I stood up, wiped my eyes,
And tiptoed into a little clearing
With only the sound of hidden insects
To accompany my ritual stalk and breath.
Suddenly my heart leaped into my hand
As I saw a movement not fifty feet away
The sunlight filtering through the leaves
To envelop the gorgeous creature
In a golden-brown haze,
Strange, proud scion of sky and earth,
Its neck firm and erect,
Its tuft of wing flecked with a lost-world tint
Of rainbow trout in a pool of ferns.
There was no sound
But the beating of two wild hearts.
With the ancient thirst ripe within me
My finger squeezed the lock of my 20-gauge
And the long-tailed ring-necked pheasant
Surprised in its solitary foraging
Collapsed like a rag doll.
The prize was mine!
Why did I not move?
I saw something greenish-blue and red
Come running from the brush
In a frenzy of clucking
Speaking to the lump of bone, flesh, and feathers,
Seeking to lead it to safety.
Rance called from the farther hill
But I did not answer.
I looked at my gun.
The woods and the bird and I
Were equally still.



Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore



Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Moving Pictures

Nancy Dillingham

Outside, the dampness of the summer night drapes itself around them like a light sweater. The youngest is asleep in the father's arms as they all pile into the old car. The roughness of the seats against their shorts-clad legs nudges them like a cat's tongue. The night is so clear it is perfect; the moon, a distant dime's worth of cool light dropped on the smooth, dark cloth of the sky.

As the small car moves through the quiet countryside in the night air, around the curving road toward home, its dim headlights hugging the next curve, all of the children (except the youngest, who sleeps by their father on the front seat) sit on the backseat together, their bare feet stretched out in front of them on the floorboard, their fingers curled around the edges of the seat for a good grip, their heads thrown back, watching the moon out the back window. First, it follows the car, bouncing just above their heads; then it suddenly appears over to the right, hiding behind a bump in the mountain; and, finally, it leads them.

This game of watching the moon keeps them awake until they rattle over the loose planks of the bridge, move over the blackberry-lined dirt road, and grind up the rocky bank home where they tumble out sleepily to bed . . . .

Each Saturday night after supper, during the summer, they all pile into the car—except their mama, of course, who uses the time to wash or iron or clean—and drive down to the local grocery store where they watch television in Mae Ivy's living room, built on to the back of the store. Mrs. Ivy, the owner of the store, walks in and out between intervals of waiting on customers, sucking cola from a bottle. As she holds the bottle up in her white, sleeveless arm, the children think some of the cola must run directly into it, it looks so fat.

Saturday night is a busy time at the store, clusters of cars coming and going, loud voices and laughter punctuating the flickering, blue images on the small television screen, injecting themselves into Perry Como's solo as he perches casually on a stool or into Matt Dillon's stiff-legged shoot-out.

The country store is this family's Saturday night at the picture show. Barefoot, the children troop in behind their father, through the narrow walking space between the whirring freezers and shelves lined with crackers and cookies, past the bread tray, to the counters of candy, chewing tobacco, and cigarettes near the cash register, past the crowd, into the narrow door leading to the darkened living room, feeling the coolness of the concrete floor seeping into their feet and the hot, blowing air from the freezers on their bare legs, smelling the mingling of candy and tobacco and the newness of paper bags and cellophane wrapping.

The children fidget a little at first, settling in. They aren't crazy about Perry Como's musical interlude, but they sometimes recognize one of the songs because they have heard it at home when they put their ears to the small radio, pressing their hands against its warm back to keep the sound from fading out. (The radio is encased in plastic with a big crack down the middle of it where one of the children accidentally got tangled in its cord and pulled it off the high chest of drawers and broke it. They bandaged it with some black, sticky tape they found in their daddy's old tool box so that it looks now like a cracked skull, a head talking and talking out of control as they switch its dial back and forth.)

They settle down in earnest, however, for the western feature. Sometimes the harsh tales of *Gunsmoke* leave them trembling or cause them to suck a piece of ice down their throats from the cola that Daddy buys from the machine out front. But they know the tales are not real when Daddy reaches forward and pats them on their backs, laughing softly. As they sit lined up on the couch in the darkened living room, the drama of life, on-screen and off, dips in and around them (like the moon), as far removed from them as the moon they watch from the back seat of the car as it carries them safely home.

One Saturday night, when the gunshots on the screen are echoed by those outside and when suddenly there are no intervals of laughter interrupting the drama on the flickering screen, Mrs. Ivy comes through the narrow door and speaks to their father who is sitting at the end of the couch in a straight-backed chair with the sleeping baby in his arms. You better get the children out of here, she says.

The children lean forward on the couch in one motion, sucking in their breaths collectively, their little mouths forming small *O*'s. Then they all scramble up quickly and follow their daddy out through Mrs. Ivy's side door, making their way to the car parked out of the way of traffic.

As they walk, they can see a circle of overall-clad men gathered around a pick-up truck under the pools of icy-blue light from the big, round lamps that hang over the gas pumps. The men's heads jerk toward the sound, and, at the sight of four small children trailing their daddy (who carries another in his arms), their stiff, little shadows jumping up and down like soldiers behind them, the men hover closer to the truck, closing the circle, protecting it—and the children. But it is too late. The little troopers have already seen the body beside the truck.

They are just getting in the car, the father hurriedly sticking the sleeping child through the door onto the seat beside him, when the small, white ambulance arrives, followed closely by a brown sheriff's car with a gold star on its side and a flashing light on top. The light flashes across the back window of the ancient car where the children now gather, protected by its rusty shell.

But it has touched them, and that night, as they lie sleeping in their beds, it touches them again, in their dreams, sending their arms flailing, causing them to whimper softly, as the moon hovers distantly overhead.

Player Piano

Julia Nunnally Duncan

The player piano has lost its smell.
All my polishing of wood and scrubbing of ivory
have dissolved the mustiness
of decades in my grandmother's parlor.

Sometimes I dream of that front room,
the cool air and scent of mildew;
the white lace curtains
that let in shadows from the woods;
rose-patterned linoleum rug
and floral-print mohair couch
with hand-embroidered antimacassars—
a scene from the twenties,
suspended in time.

Here the piano sat,
its rubber tubing stripped for World War II,
its mechanism long destroyed;
the expression levers useless
to a child's curious fingers.
But the yellow, chipped keys
still offered a chiming sound
those Sunday evenings in the sixties
when I plunked hymns for my grandmother.

Today, in my house,
I press my nose to the closed mahogany lid
and stroke my hand across the sliding doors
that opened once to perforated rolls—
fox-trots and waltzes—
and I inhale.
Gone, though, is the smell,
except in my mind,
in my memory of that room.

CALL OF THE MILD

Cynthia Stewart

WINTER GRAY. GOTTA GET AWAY.
WHITE BEACHES BECKON. I'M COMING, I SAY.
GONNA SUN AWAY WINTER GRAY.

WINTER GRAY. GOTTA GET AWAY.
DISNEYWORLD DREAMLAND WORTH WHAT WE PAY.
GONNA PLAY AWAY WINTER GRAY.

WINTER GRAY. GOTTA GET AWAY.
BERMUDA, BAHAMAS, PERDIDO BAY.
GONNA SAIL AWAY WINTER GRAY.

WINTER GRAY. GOTTA GET AWAY.
ORCHIDS AND OCEAN, A HULA, A LEI.
GONNA SWAY AWAY WINTER GRAY.

WINTER GRAY. GOTTA GET AWAY.
BOUGAINVILLEA BREEZES WARM AS MAY.
GONNA BLOW AWAY WINTER GRAY.

WINTER GRAY. GOTTA GET AWAY.
JET PLANE AT SUNRISE
SLICES THROUGH ORANGE SKIES
TO BLUES-CHASING BLUE SKIES.
NO LONGER GRAY.
YEAH!

Silence

Celia Miles

Old Cal Carter held the record in Jackson County—and many a bet had been lost by newcomers who didn't believe it—for silence. In fact, some upstart from two counties over started calling Cal "Sil" a few years before Cal died, but the name never did catch on. Everybody was too used to Cal, and then to Old Cal.

Cal was stubborn. Everybody knew that. If he believed something, he'd not be dissuaded by facts. Nor by feelings. And he meant what he said. His word, they said, was "as good as his bond." Combine those two qualities—stubbornness and honesty—and you sometimes create a mixture that's downright awe-inspiring. Or downright silly. Depending on your view. Most men thought the first. Most women thought the second.

It started when his wife didn't get along with his dog, Shady. Amanda Carter was a big woman, handy with a scythe as well as a skillet; she knew when to speak and when to listen, generally.

Most people considered Cal Carter a lucky man when he married her. After all her daddy owned the grist mill, and Cal was assured a life-long job if he wanted it since Amanda was blessed with three sisters and no brothers. And not just three ordinary sisters who might have also married well. The oldest sister left home when the carnival came to town, took up with the mechanic who kept the rides going. She never was heard from again. The only thing people could remember about the mechanic (that's what she called him in the note she left, "the mechanic") was his exceedingly oily black hair and his very oily black hands. The next year when Mabley's Carnival came to town around Labor Day, you can bet people kept a sharp lookout for the mechanic (and May, of course). The blond teenager who kept a cigarette in his lips while he watched the Ferris wheel and the sky diver just shrugged. Except for his fingernails, though, his hands were clean.

And Barbara moped around for two years after May's disappearing act; then she up and married a widowed Bledsoe with six children under the age of thirteen from over in Yancey County. She was eighteen then. Jim Bledsoe grinned from ear to ear when Barbara hopped into his car, after the ceremony at the courthouse, with four of his kids. People wondered: did she expect him to die in a hurry and leave her the Bledsoe Farm? He was only forty-six, even if he looked as old as her grandpa.

That's when people started saying things like "What's them Sutton girls going do next?" Nobody could have predicted—that's for sure. Sarah was the quietest and the slimmest of the girls: dark, inward-looking eyes, pretty, upturned nose, long black hair. Everybody had her figured for a preacher's wife or at least a teacher's wife, if any eligible ones happened along. None did. Reverend Pickens was likely to stay at Piney Grove Missionary Baptist forever, especially since it was a part-time job and didn't pay on a regular basis. The First Methodist Church in town regularly got married pastors, and the other churches anywhere near the Sutton place had family men attached to them. Nobody paid much attention to Sarah's reading habits on the rare occasions she went to the county library, and, if she got some strange magazines in the mail, the postmaster didn't talk about them. Anyway, Sarah slipped away on the bus one spring afternoon. She, too, left a note. "I'm going to become a nun. Don't try to find me." Well, a mechanic and a chance to travel—anybody could understand that. And the security of an older,

clearly experienced man with a good-sized farm, that was certainly not unusual. But a nun? What was a nun, anyway? Sarah's parents went to the library and for help. They read about it in a big encyclopedia and they tried, at first, to explain it to their neighbors and the congregation at Piney Grove. Men scratched their heads and couldn't believe it. Something was wrong with that girl. Women used the phrase "the bride of Christ" with wonderment and soon gave up trying to picture Sarah in a convent. Even Granny Morris didn't want to think of a place where no men were allowed.

The Suttons breathed a great sigh of relief when their youngest chose Caleb Carter when she turned eighteen. His wife and their two babies had died, leaving him with a few scrubby acres and eligibility at barely thirty. He seemed like a regular fellow even if he didn't particularly like the milling business. Amanda's dad figured when the time was right (meaning when he and Caleb were older), the new husband would come around to seeing that milling offered a good life, even if you went home most days looking ghostly and the fine white flour never did wash out of the roots of your hair.

But hair was what Cal was interested in. Not four years after the wedding when the baby was not even a year old, Cal took off for Charlotte and barbering school. When he came back, he set up shop in a room off Snyder's store. He couldn't even pay for a striped barber pole for years, but gradually the men started stopping in for a haircut and found they liked the "men only" atmosphere. Pretty soon, the women folk tucked the clippers in the back of the dresser and Cal was accepted as "The Barber." He could tell a good story, listen even better, and, after the first few days, had a sure hand and steady eye. And he was honest and stubborn.

Besides barbering, Cal's main interest was his hunting dogs. He wasn't much of a hunter, but he spent lots of nights trailing the sounds of his Plott hounds, coming in exhausted in body but serene in spirit. He'd send one of the kids down to put a "closed" sign in the shop. That was one of his peculiarities. He refused to put a "closed" sign up each night when he locked the door. "Bad luck," he'd mutter. So every time he dragged in at five a.m. and didn't rouse up with the rooster's crowing and then the alarm clock, Amanda shook him awake. Sometimes he'd get up and go to the shop, sometimes he'd grunt, "Send Jamie to the shop." After the first few years, Cal knew if a customer didn't get his haircut one day, he'd get it another. Nothing to worry about. Amanda liked things more orderly, and she especially didn't like Cal's dogs.

Amanda never had liked them although Cal didn't know that until at least three months after the ink'd dried on the marriage certificate, and she especially didn't like Shady. Shady didn't slink away when she yelled. Shady liked to stay too close to the house. After ten years of marriage, Amanda took her irritations out on Shady, who was pretty old for a dog and not much use for hunting.

Cal kept the six dogs in a lot behind some trees, out of sight of the house. Amanda insisted on that. But Shady was the oldest and plenty of times when Cal was home, sitting on the porch and doing nothing, Shady lay under a tree at the edge of the yard. He did know his place; not one foot closer did he come.

Until that day when Cal and Amanda were having a noisy discussion. Nobody—not even the two of them—now knows what they started arguing about: food, a woman (not likely, was the consensus), Cal's love of hunting, Jamie's skipping school, or the howling of the hounds out back. As Mr. Sutton said, "Lord, they's so many things a lawfully wed couple can fight about, who could be expected to remember?"

The kids came out on the porch to watch as Amanda followed Cal down the steps into the clean-as-a-whistle yard. She had been getting supper and carried an iron skillet in one hand and a piece of stovewood in the other. Maybe Shady thought she'd really hit Cal, wild-eyed as she looked or maybe the shouting snapped him from a violent dream. He raised his head in the still summer air and laid his ears back. As the arguing continued and the adversaries circled in the yard, Shady uncurled himself and stood. Jamie or maybe six-year-old Laymon threw an apple core toward the dog, meaning no harm. Just for something to do since their parents were beginning to repeat themselves.

The kids do remember that as Shady began to move toward the couple, Amanda screeched something to the effect that one of these days she was going to kill somebody if he didn't watch out.

"Yeah, you and who else?" Cal wasn't particularly skilled at skirmishing with Amanda; his part was to keep the skirmish going, never expecting to win it, but hoping to tire the enemy into subsiding.

"Me and whoever it takes!" Amanda spied the rangy hound coming into her yard, something he hadn't done in years since she'd shown him the long end of a broom. "And that there dog better stay out of this yard," she yelled.

"You leave that dog alone. He ain't bothering you." Cal looked over his shoulder and stumbled over something underfoot. His kids swear their mother never touched him. Anyway he went down on one knee and Amanda flourished the skillet above his head.

Shady reached Cal and had the temerity to growl at Amanda, glaring down on Cal as she was. She backed up a step and threatened, "I'll get that dog if it growls at me again. I swear it."

"Forget the damn dog!" Cal got to his feet but even then he was a foot shorter than Amanda. He reached up to fend off the skillet which she was waving close to his ear. Shady growled again, baring his teeth.

"Get that dog away from me and this yard, Cal Carter," she said, "Or I'll hit it with this piece of stovewood."

"You hit Shady, Amanda," Cal said and then he stopped. He couldn't believe she'd threatened his dog. He started again, "You hit that dog, Amanda, and I'll—I'll never speak to you as long as I live!"

Now most men said, when they heard the kids' version of the day's activity, that Cal was mighty calm to threaten no more than that. Privately they thought (and said when they were listening to their dogs yapping through the woods on the trail of a fox or something bigger) Cal should have done more than threaten. "Words just don't get through sometimes to a woman," opined young Daniel McKee before he remembered that his father-in-law was listening. The old man spit fiercely into the fire and held on to the jug just long enough before passing it on to the boy to send a message. Another man helped young Daniel out, "Yeah, sometimes. But Cal ain't never hit a woman, never hit nobody as far as I know and I've knowed him all his life."

"You don't say things like that to a man who loves his dogs," another said, and they all nodded.

Amanda had had enough. Cal's words challenged her very soul. And the dog still had its teeth showing—in her yard! She hauled off and hit Shady with the piece of stovewood. Who knows what might have happened if Jamie and Laymon hadn't run from the porch steps to grab Shady's collar and pull him away. Amanda had done no serious damage, hitting him on the shank. And to be fair to Cal, he moved himself between the dog and Amanda in case she needed

protection. Mrs. Sutton remarked on the wisdom of that. "What dog's gonna cook you supper and warm your bed and have your younguns?" The women agreed that Cal was smart to "know which side his bread's buttered on," even if Amanda was awfully provoking to his general good nature.

Cal stood there, watching the boys settle Shady down under his tree, and Amanda stood there watching Cal. Then she turned back to the house, carrying some stovewood and the skillet. Pretty soon the fire was going and the cabbage was frying—and things had returned to normal. Except for the rest of his life Cal never spoke a word to his wife.

Oh, she tempted him. She cooked his favorite suppers. She called him "Honey" even in front of the children. For a few months, Amanda was the picture of domestic tranquility. Nothing worked. The community made bets on how long it would take Cal to give in or, if not give in, slip up and say something, anything to his wife. After a few years the oddity turned to normality in the Carter household. Three more children were born to Amanda and Cal, and the men occasionally joked about "do sounds count?" meaning lovemaking noises, but Cal wasn't saying.

Cal continued his life absolutely as before. For a while he didn't talk any more or any less to other people or to his children. Then people noticed that he talked less and less to anybody. He listened intently, nodded often, and said less and less. By the time he was sixty, he didn't say anything anytime. He became a highly proficient barber, indicating with a look or a gesture that he understood all he heard but felt no need to volunteer any comments. Talk of politics or religion or family feuds he absorbed, but his face seldom registered anger, discontent, enthusiasm, or happiness. Yet he radiated a kind of serenity that drew customers and friends alike. He made enough money barbering to support the family, what with the gardening Amanda did. The children seemed well enough adjusted. The family portrait shows the seven of them in clean, pressed dark clothes. And Amanda, too, became reconciled to the silence of Cal toward her. She could even joke about it after a few months, saying she liked the situation. Once at a quilting party, when the conversation turned to the way husbands and wives accommodate each other's behavior, Amanda said, "Well, Cal and I never have words," and the women laughed until their sides hurt.

Everybody wondered if in his old age Cal wouldn't say a few words at least to Amanda, but he never did. As he lay dying of pneumonia after being out foxhunting for two whole days and nights, Amanda sat by his bed, watching his labored breathing, occasionally wiping his lips or putting a wet cloth to them. She didn't talk to him all night, but she held his hand as he died in silence.

To Zelda

Nancy Dillingham

Zelda
in your dancing shoes
why couldn't you choose
your way to die
in the sweet summer's
sunset?

Why couldn't you
let the end come
and pick it like a choice
plum

from the off-limits tree
that grew in the shining pool
with roots in the
sky?

Photo by Peggy Higgins

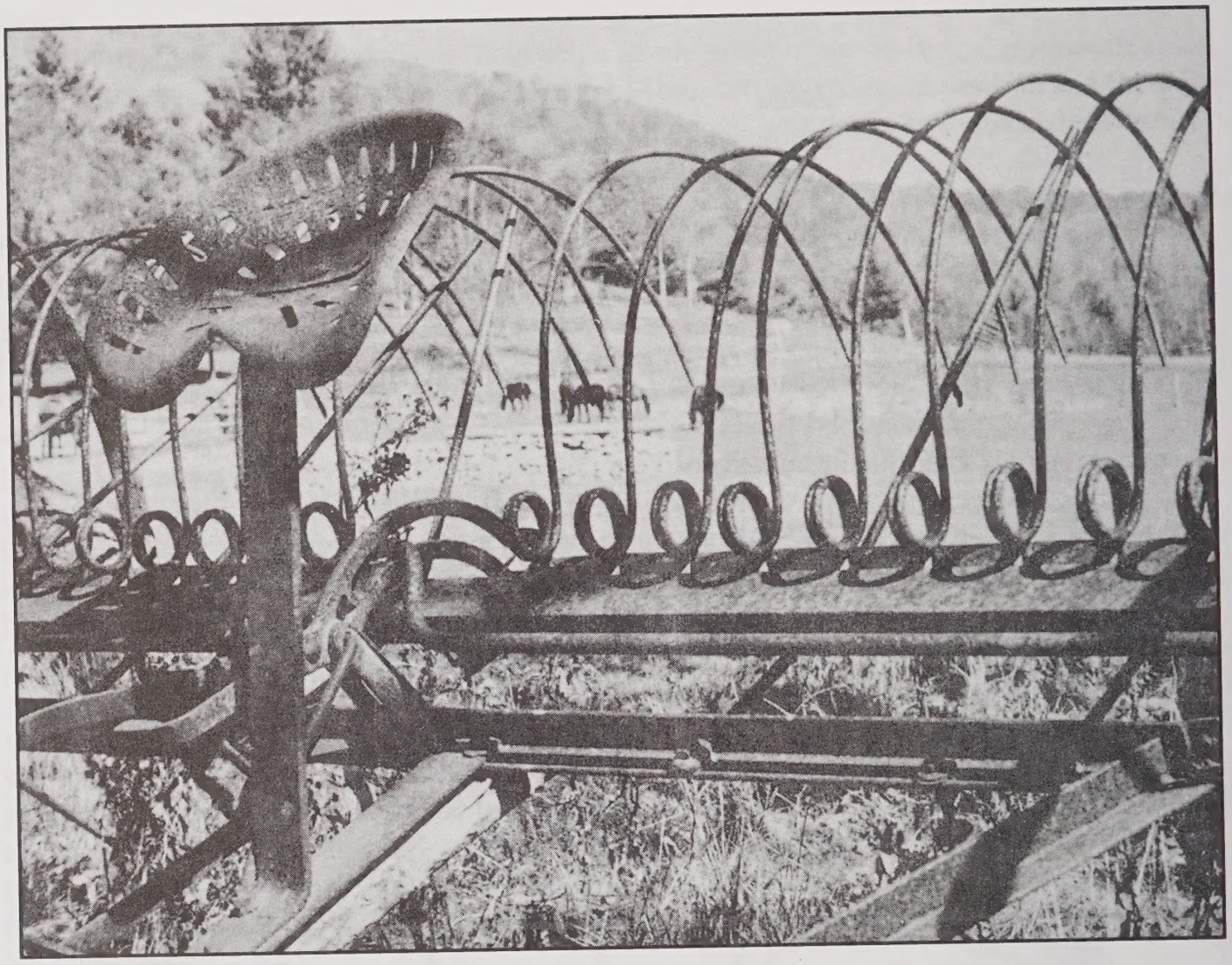


Photo by Celia Miles

Skippy

Robert Anderson

My wife and I, along with our two sons, then ages ten and twelve, were driving along the Olympic Peninsula in Washington State. It was raining, and all we could see in any direction were bare mountains covered with redwood stumps and black mud. We had been camping for two weeks on the West Coast—in the rain. It was so oppressive that the kids had even stopped fighting. They were just huddled in the back of the Ford Taurus rental, slumped under their wet sleeping bags and empty Twinkie wrappers, wishing they were anywhere but with their parents, camping in the rain.

Suddenly my wife galvanized us with a bloodcurdling scream. Ahhhh! I looked over at her for some clue as to the cause; she was curled up in a ball with her feet in the seat and her hands over her eyes. I looked out at the sky and the mud and the stumps, trying to see some cause for this. I looked back at the boys, and they had come to life with their faces pressed against the foggy windows. They looked puzzled, but excited.

When I got the car back under control, and my wife had recovered enough to talk, she said, "There's a rat in the floor!" I pulled over into a log yard at a sawmill. The black mud was about four inches deep, but this was an emergency! We all jumped out of the car in the mud and rain, and I started pulling all the junk out of the car and piling it on top. The kids loved it. I thought it was just the novelty of the moment, but there were things that I didn't know at the time.

The lunch whistle blew at the mill, and the workers came out in their pickup trucks to ask what the problem was. (I know we looked sort of unusual.) When I told them my wife said that there was a rat in the car, they got out their lunch boxes and climbed on their pickups to watch the spectacle.

After cleaning out the car and feeling under the seats and dash, I couldn't find anything. When I stepped back to decide what to do next, one of the kids spied the culprit looking out of the spokes of one of the back wheels. It was a little deer mouse, brown with a white nose and white feet. He was wiggling his little nose, and I could almost see him laughing at the strange humans too dumb to get in out of the rain. We looked at him for a bit. The kids named him Skippy for a squirrel that had been screwing the lid off our Skippy peanut butter and eating it in a campground in Coos Bay.

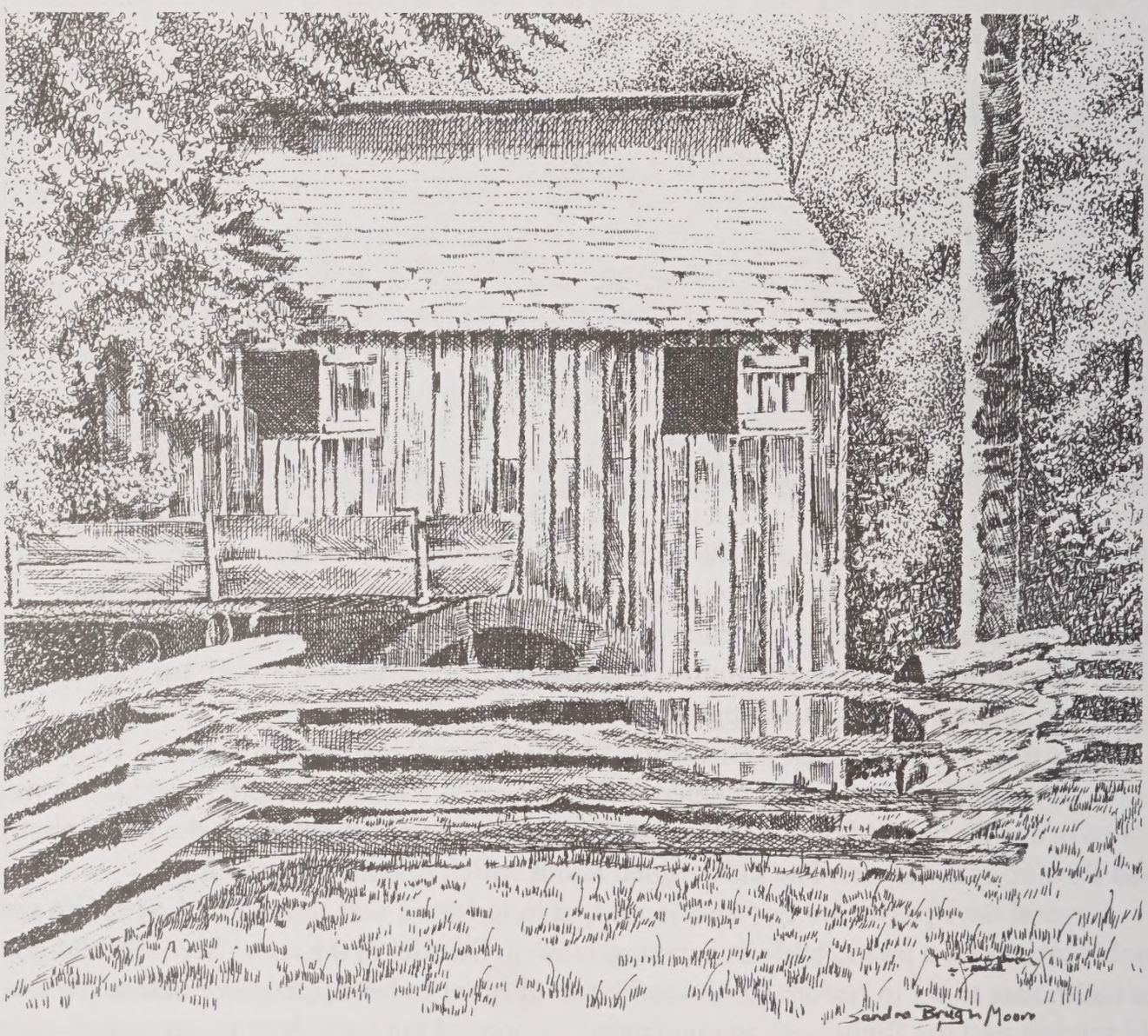
I got the children to watch him while I loaded everything back in the car. They were very concerned about what would happen to Skippy when the car took off. I said that I would start slowly and he would fall out of the wheel. As I pulled out in the road, the black clumps of mud flew up into the air. The kids argued about which one might be Skippy.

Several days passed on our travels, and, at long last, it was time to fly home. We were miserably sitting on a picnic table in a campground in Seattle, in the rain. My wife had gone to the bathhouse to try to restore some semblance of order to her appearance before the last day of touring and the flight back to civilization. I opened the back door to get something out of the back seat—and there was Skippy! He ran under the back seat, and I panicked and ripped the back seat bottom out of the car. There was a mouse's nest. Skippy ran out and up

under the back of the seat. I got a stick and started beating the back of the seat to run him out. Suddenly I had a vision of what everybody in the campground was seeing. I was leaning into the back of the car viciously beating something with a stick, while the kids were running around the car screaming, "Dad's killing Skippy!"

I got out of the car, put the seat back in, and told the kids that if they told Mom, she would not get back in the car, and we would not be able to go home, "and I'll kill Skippy!" They didn't say a word until we got to the airport.

Some years later I found out that the mouse had been with us for the whole trip up the West Coast. The boys had been hand feeding it junk food for the entire trip. As far as I know, Skippy is alive and well and living in a rental car at the Seattle Airport.



Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Compromise

Nancy Dillingham

I started liking apple blossoms
that one day in April
when the lilacs got killed
again
for the I-don't-know-how-many years
in a row.

I had stopped counting
by then.
Childlike, I figured they must be delicate
or just too eager.

So I found that bright, blown morning
with the smell of lilacs a sweet memory
and the sugary spiciness of apple blossoms hitting,
that they could serve me well.

They endure.

Hack off limbs and doggedly they return
next year
with new green sprouting
in the most unlikely, unbalanced places.

They are safe,
and I break armfuls
in my quest

and leave mangled
up and down
free forms for the sun to shine
hard upon.

Photo by Celia Miles

Excerpted from *The Stone Garden*
a novel in progress

Bill Brooks

"On the following morning, the alcalde, Alejandro Segura, held an inquest on the body. Hon. M. Rudolph, of Sunnyside, was foreman of the coroner's jury. They found a verdict that William H. Bonney came to his death from a gun-shot wound, the weapon in the hands of Pat F. Garrett, that the fatal wound was inflicted by the said Garrett in the discharge of his official duty as sheriff, and that the homicide was justifiable.

"The body was neatly and properly dressed and buried in the military cemetery at Fort Sumner, July 15, 1881. His exact age on the day of his death, was 21 years, 7 months, and 21 days.

"I said that the body was buried in the cemetery at Fort Sumner; I wish to add that it is there to-day intact. Skull, fingers, toes, bones, and every hair of the head that was buried with the body on that 15th day of July, doctors, newspaper editors, and paragraphers to the contrary notwithstanding. Some presuming swindlers have claimed to have the Kid's skull on exhibition, or one of his fingers or some other portion of his body, and one medical gentleman has persuaded credulous idiots that he has all the bones strung upon wires. It is possible that there is a skeleton on exhibition somewhere in the States, or even in this Territory, which was procured somewhere down the Rio Pecos. We have them, lots of them in this section. The banks of the Pecos are dotted from Fort Sumner to the Rio Grande with unmarked graves, and the skeletons are of all sizes, ages, and complexions. Any showman of ghastly curiosities can resurrect one or all of them, and place them on exhibition as the remains of Dick Turpin, Jack Shepherd, Cartouche, or the Kid, with no one to say him nay; so don't ask the people of the Rio Pecos to believe it."—Pat Garrett.

The only showman I know of ghastly curiosities is Garrett. He shot poor Billy Barlow that night with a notched bullet and said it was me—face all gone, the poor fools believed him, the rest held their tongues and swallowed the secret. Garrett was a killer and he would murder anyone who opposed him, make no mistake about that. He wrote his own history, the way he would have you eat it.

One man had my head in a jar of brine and charged a quarter to view it. Another my finger in a box and charged a dime. Toes and belly buttons if they could. Surprised they didn't sell my pecker for a dollar. Put it on a string like a chili pepper.

I still got everything I was born with: pecker, toes, fingers and head. Unwashed by the Pecos and carried away like poor Charlie and Tom and Billy Barlow. Dig a hole and find me in it, and I'll say what Garrett said, that he killed me that night in Maxwell's with a lucky shot to the breast. Damn good shooting you ask me. One through the heart, in pitch black.

A motor car disturbs my rest.
Sun dapples through the trees
& lays an arabesque upon the walk
where children dance on outlined squares
of chalk and hop and skip and jump happily
to the tunes that play in their merry heads.

I got word Joe had died in a hotel alone, or did I mention that already? He wanted to whip Antrim's ass for taking mother from us and I was willing to pitch in and help him. Now he's died, alone, alone and I can't help him anymore. I wonder did he think of me in that last hour, or had the whisky fogged his mind or the hatred clouded his thoughts, leaving him pitching through the dark to the long cold death that awaited. Alone, alone.

Manuela and I stood on the veranda of our hotel and watched the great falls plummeting, plumes of mist rising in the air like fog or horses' breath on a frozen morning. All that water rushing felt as though it washed away the grime of my history and for a time, I was unbound, free and floating, happy again. I never saw so much water.

The first night we went out onto the veranda and saw the electric lights and heard the roar of the falls and could see them illuminated, the water blue and frothy and I wondered where it all came from, what had borne it and what force had guided it to this point where it crashed and fell over the edge, roaring, roaring like a hundred freight trains.

"Look," I said, pointing to the water below where it looked to me like the electric lights were submerged under the darkening waters and she turned and saw it too and wondered how they had gotten there.

It overtook us, the force of it and I placed my hands on her breasts and felt the tips of them go hard between my fingers as she moved against me and lowered her dress.

"Henry," she said, the power of the water drawing us together unable to resist it.

We made love there on the veranda, the great roar of the falls in our ears, the thrum of its power vibrating through us as she gave herself to me freely and recklessly in a way she never had before. And for a time I felt as though I had drawn her heart back from the grave where Charlie held it in his cold gray hands all those days and weeks and months. Her passion was a fire in me, burning, burning until my soul was consumed and the falling water washed away my sins. Afterward we lay there, our skin damp from the mist, our hair wet and tangled and slept until the night gave way to our destiny.

Garrett rides a pale horse stalking
the bones and eyes of me in his pockets
a dusty trail of lies spilling from his eyes
watchful, ever watchful for the truth of his infamy
coiled like a snake near his feet ready to strike him down.

Celsa was there and wept that day as though it was really me. And so did Paulina and Rosita and all the rest of the girls I knew and loved in Fort Sumner. Years after they would grow old knowing that it was not me Garrett had murdered (by his own confession) and dropped down deep in a hole with Charlie and Tom where we awaited the Rio Pecos to come and take us.

Manuela was not the best lover I ever had, but that night on the veranda, she was and I knew in that waning moment she would never be again. That *we* would never be again. But for that one moment, she was as a drop of rain upon my tongue, and I a man thirsting.

Consolation

Cynthia Stewart

Hi, ho, Silver. I mount my steed—
my trusty Dakota ten-speed.

I'm off to battle Dragon Despair
in sunset-soft forest air.

Filigreed trees frame a gilded sky
as sunset glory whizzes by.

Racing a stream at water's edge.
I catch last light's dance on a diamond bridge.

Woodland beauty again consoles,
calms fears that make dark doubts bold,

Brings quiet that quells Despair's fierce fire,
brings peace that proves Despair a liar.

Woodland calm conquers Dragon Despair,
drives him back to his fear-fouled lair.

I find what I seek on the forest road
Despair's undoing, Beauty's abode.

Belief Springs Eternal

Cynthia Stewart

Anyone can believe in April,
sniffing a resurrected daffodil.

And anyone can believe in the splendor of September
when leaves swirl gold
against a cobalt sky.

Fall—yes, it's the year's descent to death—
but as triumphant as that
Palm Sunday entry into Jerusalem,
spirits high as palm leaves fly.

But when, in that dark Golgotha of January, a dingy sky
spits snow
while tree limbs are snapping and creaking like bones
breaking,
when birds with wind-ruffled feathers huddle together
like that flock of bewildered followers who shivered
in hopelessness at the foot of the cross,
then I, too, feel abandoned.

And when, in February, bare-boned trees shiver
under steel gray skies weeping rain,
and when hoarse winds moan like the dirges
sung by soulsick sisters
bearing burying spices to a God-forsaken sepulcher,
then I, too, have bouts with doubt.

But, when a March morning dawns paradise pretty,
radiant as the risen Christ who appeared
in that first Easter sunrise
to the few who persevered,
and when April choirs of honeybees
hum hallelujahs in my apple trees,
and when my leaf-shrouded backyard garden
reappears—erupts in a May rainbow of colors—
a promise forgotten in the dark of December,
then my doubts are rolled away like the stone at the tomb,
my faith returns again on the wings of my fair-weather,
feathered friends,
my belief is borne again on June's grape iris breath
and eternal life seems a gift again,
not a sentence.

I'll Be Right Back, Sweetie: A True Story

Greta W. Clark

At 8 o'clock I tripped up the steps to my office with my morning's first cup of coffee and sausage biscuit, only to trip on the top step, pitching forward and catching myself with my right hand. After I recovered from the shock of watching my first cup of coffee trickle down the steps and looked around to see if anyone saw me fall, I checked myself out to see if I was injured. To my dismay, my little finger was protruding at an upward angle—it wasn't a pretty sight. But I hadn't torn a run in my stockings.

I gathered up my things, including the empty coffee cup, and went inside. My co-workers and I unanimously agreed that my finger needed attention. Linda came to my rescue and took me to an urgent care center. (I should have stopped for coffee on the way.)

I was telling the person behind the glass window what had happened . . . . Have a seat, please, and fill out these forms. You know the routine—medical history, one form with about 50+ questions, insurance information, release for treatment, who to notify in case . . . . Linda filled them out, signed them for me, and returned them to the person behind the glass window. It was now about 8:30.

Ms. Clark? Come with me. How did you do that, sweetie? I fell. Does it hurt? A little. Where did you fall? At work. Do you have worker's comp coverage? Yes. Who should I call to verify that? Ms. Smith. Ms. Smith, this is the urgent care center and I have Greta Clark here in my office. She said she fell at work. Will your worker's comp cover her injury? I guess she said yes, because they continued with the routine—listened to my heart, took my temperature, took my blood pressure (normal). Have you eaten anything today? No. (I didn't think she needed to know about the coffee.) Are you allergic to any medicines? Not that I'm aware of. Next of kin? And what seemed like a million other questions. Have a seat in here and we'll get x-rays. After the x-rays I sent Linda to the waiting room. By then I was very cold. I was almost shivering and thinking about the spilled coffee.

About 9:30 a doctor came in, told me he looked at the x-rays, that I had dislocated my little finger, and that he was making me an appointment to see a hand surgeon, and that he hadn't seen an injury quite like it and wouldn't consider trying to reset it. I'll be back in a few minutes to let you know about the appointment with the hand surgeon. OK. He came back in about fifteen minutes. It seemed like an hour with my being cold and hungry and needing a cup of coffee.

I arrived at the Hand Center about 10:00, waited about 10 minutes, filled out more forms—one with 50+ questions. Do you have worker's comp? Yes. Who should I call to verify that? Ms. Smith. Ms. Smith, this is the Hand Center and I have Greta Clark here in my office. She said she fell at work. Will it cover this? Have you eaten anything? No, nothing, I said. By then I wasn't thinking about the coffee. I was into something that wasn't going to include a cup of coffee or a sausage biscuit right away. While I was answering her questions, I overheard a doctor, in a very agitated voice, say, I can see her if she's already here—I'm leaving in a few minutes. She's ready. Come with me, sweetie—the nurse said that, not the doctor. The forms would have to wait; he was in a hurry.

Around 10:30 I was put in an examining room. A person took my temperature and my blood pressure (normal). How did you hurt your hand, sweetie? Fell. Does it hurt? A little. What have you had to eat or drink today? Nothing. Are you allergic to any medications? Not that I'm aware of. The doctor will be with you in a minute. She left the door open and I could see the doctor, who seemed to be darting from one examining room to another, shaking his head as if everyone was doing the wrong thing. He mumbled something about needing to leave. (I wanted to leave, too). The nurse came back once. Are you OK, sweetie? Yes.

The doctor came whizzing in about 10:45, seemingly agitated because I was there, but I guess other things were irritating him. Although, he was very nice and gentle and carefully explained everything he was doing. How did you injure your hand? Does it hurt? Have you eaten today? Fell. A little. No. (And I thought of the cup of coffee I watched trickle down the steps.) He described the injury, telling me he was pretty certain he could not put it back in joint, but he would try. Are you allergic to any medications? Not that I'm aware . I'll numb your finger. It will hurt a little, but I'll be as gentle as possible. I felt a little uneasy having him do this while he was in a bad mood and wanting to leave. He, as gently as possible, stuck in the needle (big needle), poking it in every direction possible. Now it hurt more than just a little. I'll be right back.

The doctor came back with a nurse. To the nurse he said, You hold her wrist and other three fingers while I try to reset. Nurse, he said, while throwing himself back in his chair like he was giving up (don't give up now I thought), how can I get to her finger if you are going to do it like that? Nurse looked him square in the face and said with authority, as nurses usually do, You tell me where you want me to be and how you want it held and I'll do just that. So he got her situated the way he wanted her and asked me if I was ready. I wasn't, but said I was. It felt as though (I didn't watch) he stretched my little finger two inches longer than it was. The thought actually went through my mind that he might pull it off or break it—a sickening thought. It wasn't as numb as I would have liked. After a lot of pulling and stretching, he said I just can't reset it. You will need surgery. He said he couldn't do the surgery for another two or three hours, that he had to leave his office, and that the surgery should be done right away. I believe another doctor can do it; he is in surgery now downstairs. He can do it here in the Center. I'll find out if he can do it. I'll be back in a few minutes. The nurse brought the other unfinished forms, which I signed with my left hand. I couldn't read my own signature, but she seemed satisfied with it. Incidently, my finger was now at a different angle, but not in joint.

My harried doctor returned about 11:00. Yes, my colleague can do it as soon as he gets out of surgery in about 30 minutes. He will do the surgery right here in the Hand Center. He will give you something to relax you and numb your arm. You should be finished about 2:00. I told Linda she could leave. I called a friend who lives about an hour away with nothing better to do than enjoy my day with me, and he said he would arrive about 2:00 to take me home.

A nurse said, Come with me, we'll go downstairs and get you ready for surgery. A different nurse took my temperature, listened to my heart, took my blood pressure (still normal). We filled out more forms. I was getting better writing with my left hand. How did

you hurt your hand, sweetie? Bless your heart. Have you eaten? Good, you probably won't get sick.

I was put in a room on an examining table. Little booties were put over my shoes, a little bonnet over my hair, and a gown over my clothes. Another form was filled out. Have you eaten anything today. No. That's good. Maybe you won't get sick. The surgeon will be here in a few minutes. Sorry you hurt your hand and have to spend your day like this. That's OK. I didn't want to go to work today anyway.

Another nurse came in around 11:30. Are you OK, sweetie? I nodded. Have you eaten anything today? No. Good, you probably won't get sick. (I thought of the coffee and sausage biscuit—I would have risked it.) I'm getting ready to put patches on you to monitor your heart during surgery. She stuck little patches around on my chest and left. I lay down on the examining table and dozed off. What else could I do? I hadn't had my first cup of coffee. But it won't be long now; it will be over at 2:00.

In a few minutes the anesthetist came in to check me out before surgery. He took my blood pressure (still normal) and pulse rate. Have you eaten anything today? Good, you probably won't get sick. Are you allergic? And on and on. I'll give you something to relax you before surgery and numb your arm and hand. He shuffled through all my forms. I'll see you in a few minutes. So everything was set; the surgery will be over at 2:00.

About noon, a nurse came back in. (I had seen so many, I didn't know if she was different.) Are you cold? Yes? She covered me with a blanket. I got warm and dozed off while I was thinking about the coffee and wondering if someone had eaten my biscuit. I could doze. I hadn't had coffee. For the next thirty minutes or so, I had several more visits from different people asking me, Are you OK, sweetie? Yes, I'm fine, I'm just relaxing while I wait.

About 1:15, a new person (not a nurse) came in. I'm sorry this is taking so long, but we just learned that the anesthetist had to leave, and we aren't going to be able to do the surgery here. She must have been their PR person because she did a good job of making it sound routine for an anesthetist to leave right before a scheduled surgery. You will have to have it done at the hospital. I'll take you to the surgeon's office and he will explain everything. While I was removing my booties, bonnet, and gown, another nurse came in. The nurse already there asked the new nurse, Where is the form she signed giving consent for treatment. It was there with the other papers. I can't find it. And I said, The anesthetist was here; maybe he took it. I'll sign another one if you need it. I thought, Why not? Just one more form. I don't want to get the nurse in trouble. The doctor is already in a not-so-good mood.

On the way to the surgeon's office, I passed the reception area. I said, If my friend comes in, tell him where I am. Please have a seat and the surgeon will be here in a few minutes. It was extremely cold in his office. I had gotten use to the little booties, bonnet, and gown keeping me warm. I wished I still had them on.

My friend was right on time to pick me up. By then I knew it was going to take a little longer than I had thought. I filled him in on the change in plans before the surgeon came back.

The surgeon arrived and explained to me about the anesthetist leaving and the plans for doing the surgery at the hospital. He said arrangements had been made to operate about 5:00. He put a temporary cast on my hand so I wouldn't hurt it before the surgery. May we leave and go to the hospital at 5:00? No, he said, you need to go directly to the hospital. It will take a little while to check you in, and don't eat anything. (That meant no coffee.) We arrived at the hospital about 2:30. Please have a seat over there in the waiting room, we'll be with you in a few minutes.

Ms. Clark? Would you follow me, please? Have a seat. I had to start from the beginning as though I had just arrived with my injury. Does it hurt? A little. Where? At work. What time? 8:00 this morning. Can you hear me, sweetie? That did it! One sweetie too many! I said, in a not-so-friendly voice, I didn't come here because of my hearing; I dislocated my finger. She apologized and said there was so much noise she wasn't sure I could hear her. I had answered all her questions; how did she think I did that if I couldn't hear? Maybe I gave the wrong answers. Anyway, being the basically nice person I am under better circumstances, I apologized and weakly tried to explain that I had already answered the same questions twice. (I didn't mention the coffee trickling down the steps.) I know, she said, but we can't use any documents from the Hand Center. We must get our own information. Are you allergic? Have you eaten? Do you have? Who should I call? Ms. Smith, this is Mercy Hospital, I have Greta. She said she fell. Will it cover?

About 3:00—Mrs. Clark? Come with me, sweetie. Another person listened to my heart, took my temperature, took my blood pressure (still normal). Have a seat in here and the anesthetist will see you in a few minutes.

Ms. Clark, this is the anesthetist. How are you Ms. Clark? Have you eaten anything today? No. Good, you probably won't get sick. Are you allergic to any medicines? Not that I'm aware of. And on and on. And some new questions. When you are ready for surgery, we'll give you something to relax you and put you to sleep. For the first time that day, I felt a little anxiety. I said, I thought it would just involve numbing my arm. No, we have to put you to sleep in the hospital. He quoted the odds on anything going wrong. They weren't good enough. I wanted his promise that I would be OK. As I was leaving his office, he said, You'll be OK. I felt better. Please have a seat across the hall. In a few minutes someone will come to get you for an EKG. (I stopped thinking about the coffee and sausage biscuit.)

Ms. Clark? Follow me. Take off all your clothes and put on this gown and get in bed and someone will come in to do an EKG. Another person came in with the EKG machine, opened my gown and said, You already have patches on your chest. (They didn't remove them before I left the Hand Center). Can you use them for this EKG? No, we have to use our own because they are different. As she began pulling them off, she said, You must have sensitive skin; they are leaving little red rings. No comment from me. Believe it or not, the EKG was normal.

About 4:00, I was rolled to another room to wait for surgery. A nurse came in to take my temperature, blood pressure (still normal), and pulse rate. She said she would have to insert an IV and draw some blood. I reluctantly gave her my hand. She began inserting the needle in the back of my hand and moving it around. She said my vein was moving and she couldn't get it in. She said, I'll be right back, sweetie. She left the needle (big needle)

hanging out of the back of my hand. I smiled—yes, I did. Finally she came back with a nurse who got the needle in the vein, but said she hadn't used that type before, and the other nurse would have to finish the connection. She did. She didn't ask me if it hurt. I was still smiling and so was my friend. Are you all right, sweetie? My arm feels cold. She understood and gently covered me with a preheated blanket. We were left alone to wait. There were some comings and goings to check on me.

The surgeon showed up right on time, 5:00 p.m. At around 6:30, I awoke with a cast on my hand. Everything was OK. I had no pain. I wasn't sick. I felt so good I really didn't care what they did to me then. Can we get you anything? I said I would love to have a hot cup of coffee. They brought me a nice cup of hot coffee and a delicious muffin. What a nice ending to a long and frustrating day. And my blood pressure was still normal. And I didn't have a run in my stockings. Doesn't take a lot to please me.

The surgeon said, You may get dressed and leave now, Mrs. Clark. At 7 p.m. my friend and I left the hospital. As I left I smiled at the nurses and doctor and said, I enjoyed spending the day with you.

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Photo by Celia Miles
Drombeg Circle near Carberry, Ireland

Circles and Stones

Celia Miles

Something about stones
enduring sonnets of soil and pain
nexus of natural and artifice created
sings to the secret in all of us.
Something about stones
regardless of sharp turns, divided minds
speaks of the open beyond all of us.
Something about stones
reminds us of the infinite
declares man's hope of mastery
by worship or by knife blade.
Something about stones
stays, silent speakers from somewhere.

And
Something about circles
odes swaying, coming back whole
saving mass from chaos in man or poem
Circles feel safe, circles warm the child in us
Something about circles
keeps us enclosed just as a tree
takes its circles upward and the
sinkhole downward, swirling
and curling,
Something about circles
attaches to stones especially
to spin us deep and inward.

Drawing by Cheryl Andrews

Learning to Teach

David Holcombe

When I was in Miss Lassie Morgan's class in the fourth grade, I first became aware of the purpose of education. Until then learning was a game for me—like puzzles. Everything was to find a part and figure something out—like reading a sentence or solving a math problem. In Miss Lassie's class everything was related to the real world: multiplication tables were used to solve time and space problems, social studies topics were taken from *Time* magazine's coverage of current events and international figures like Joseph Stalin, science was studied in relation to the physics of the Los Alamos atomic bomb tests—with pictures from *Life*, and *everything* was a reading and a writing assignment.

When I entered college, I was fortunate to have class with wonderful professors like Dr. Ella J. Pierce, who told me frankly that I wasn't producing college level work and then proceeded to teach me how to be a student, and Dr. Virgil R. Gray, Jr., who became my mentor in graduate school and showed me that I had capabilities far beyond my own limited sense of possibilities. *The people who inspired me to seek a career teaching on the college level are the people who showed me the value of a life filled with the pursuit of truth and knowledge and the absolute necessity of sharing this truth and knowledge with others.*

Two years after finishing my Bachelor of Arts degree at Mars Hill College I returned to that institution as a full-time faculty member, having completed my Master of Arts degree. Since I had been away for only a short time, the first class I met had not only my former roommate but also an old girlfriend on the roll. At that time I was very sure that I *didn't* know very much about being a college instructor. Since then I have had nine full-time years as well as five full-load adjunct years of experience. I believe that I am beginning to understand what I can help students accomplish in the classroom.

When I came to Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College as an adjunct instructor ten years ago, I discovered better students than I had been privileged to teach at either Mars Hill or Converse. The students here often weren't as well prepared academically but were more capable of success for one compelling reason—*they wanted*. These were not only younger students straight out of high school but also older adults who had been out into the world and were now returning to school valuing and desiring education—*they wanted*. I was amazed at the distance of the progress I would witness in a student over a mere two years—*they wanted*!

I realized very soon that the purpose of a community college teacher was not just to impart knowledge in the abstract like the university professor, but the purpose of the community college instructor was to create a successful college student—sometimes from a student with little prior success. My role would be to stimulate and guide these students. I knew the attributes of a competent student; my purpose became to teach success along with curriculum content. Comments about performance—even poor performance—must have a positive effect. As a teacher of public speaking and composition, I must evaluate work in areas where students are often insecure and vulnerable. I seek to comment on the merits of each piece of work as well as *ways to improve the work*, not *what is wrong* with the work. This reinforcing and constructive nurturing can take place only in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. I attempt to get to know each student personally and individually so that an atmosphere of friendly trust can help to ease the

stress which many students feel while learning. I try to let my students feel that I am here to help them, not to harm them or take away their grade. With trust, they are free to explore and experiment as they *earn* their grades.

Our College's former mission statement reveals that our purpose is "to meet students at their ability and to assist them in attaining realistic educational goals." Despite college placement testing, each student enters our classrooms with different abilities and needs. I find that I can begin to be an effective instructor only when each student feels that I am acquainted with him or her as an individual. I make a point of learning names within the first week of class. To accomplish this, I put the students in groups of three or four on the second day of class. The first three or four students alphabetically from the class roll make the first group, the second three or four students alphabetically make the second group, and so on. I go around to each group while they are working on an assigned task and ask what name each student prefers to be called by—and then I learn the names on the spot in groups of three or four. This way I am able to quickly reenforce names when I call the roll each day. When working with students in class, I make a point of calling them by name at every opportunity, and I look for opportunities outside of class when I see students to call them by name. This simple task of using names helps to establish trust and a feeling on the part of the student that I as a teacher care about him or her as an individual.

Education has "hit the fast lane" in the late 1990's. Computer classrooms, video projectors, PowerPoint laptops as well as voice-mail and e-mail are now a part of the classroom. I first put my Internet address on my course syllabi for winter quarter of last year. At that time, I did not expect that any of my students would use it. However, I have been surprised to find that the Internet is just another tool and technique that I am able to use. Students send me sections of papers with questions which I can answer—on documentation or grammar dilemmas—as easily as they can ask questions by dropping by the office, perhaps more easily, especially if they are working on their papers in a computer lab across campus. I am also able to give students net addresses on MLA style, research addresses, and search engine advice to help in classroom assignments.

Teaching English, speech, theater, and film is becoming a new experience in the electronic age. I am excited to be working with community college students at this revolutionary moment, but I am constantly aware that it is communication theory, critical thinking and analysis, rhetorical strategies, organizational skills, and editing that I am at the College to teach. I believe we who teach in these fields must never allow technology to become more than just the media tools for rigorous and top standard communication techniques. *I hope that I can always help to make our students masters of the idea, first.*

Encounter in Amsterdam

Peggy Higgins

I first noticed his shoes, butter soft, golden brown, slightly worn heels. I saw them clearly as he fled up the steep corridor ahead of me in mad pursuit of the last train from Amsterdam to Skipol Airport. He started to veer off in the wrong direction and, after I caught up with him, I told him so. He was so grateful that he insisted on paying my train fare, first class, at that, when I'd been planning on stretching my budget only as far as a second class seat. The voluptuous richness of his skin and features looked more in keeping with the lush jungles of India or some other tropic subcontinent than the damp, thin chill of northern Europe on the day after Christmas, but the cashmere overcoat he wore—butter yellow to match the shoes—showed that he had lived north of the Equator long enough to adapt to its harsher weather.

He asked if I were European, a question guaranteed to stroke the ego of any would-be-sophisticated American woman. I paused for a second to preen the bogus chic veneer that I had apparently acquired after three months abroad, and then I owned up to my more pedestrian southern American origins. He, too, was not what he seemed, neither Brahmin caste Hindu nor Dutch Indonesian trader. He was, he said, a Canadian, and I could call him "Bill."

Simultaneously, he handed me the obligatory business card, but the name engraved there bore no immediate resemblance to the one he had given me.

"My parents moved to Toronto from Bombay when I was a child," he explained, seeing my confusion. "In my business it's simpler to give a Westernized name," he added.

"And what is your business?" I asked.

"Oh, I do a number of things, but I guess you could say I'm in the publishing business. We print mostly textbooks and technical books," he said.

"How interesting," I said, automatically.

Those words turned out to be the "Open, sesame," that kept "Bill" talking, with the occasional interjection of a "Hmm" or an "Ah" from me, for the rest of the train ride. He was, it seemed, a man of many facets: publisher, gourmet cook, traveler, and single, very single. And not particularly bothered that I was not. After all, the Netherlands were a long way from North Carolina, or Toronto, for that matter. Fortunately for me, the distance between Amsterdam and the airport was a good deal shorter.

Knowing that these circuitous advances, if that's what they were, would be over in no more than a half an hour or so, and also knowing that nothing much could happen in a train compartment with a glass door, I settled down to enjoy the experience.

For that moment in time I was not the person I was at home. I instead cast myself in the role of Mysterious Foreign Woman on a Train, not the Orient Express, maybe, but as close as I was likely to get. And then it hit me. My traveling companion was playing a role, too. By the time we reached our destination, we were both quite comfortable in our chosen parts and maybe a little sorry to have the "play" come to an end. I put his card into my coat pocket and forgot about it until the following winter, when, sliding my hand in to retrieve a glove, I came upon its still-crisp edges. At first I didn't connect the foreign name with my railroad co-star, and then in a flash I was there, again, on the train leaving Amsterdam.

White lightning, planes, and such

Nancy Dillingham

He wore white bucks
and traveled light.

In a big orange bird
he took his flight.

He drank hard
and cut a rug in the sky.

People cried:
Hey, look at him fly,

flipping and zipping,
spitting fate in the eye.

He's over Vestal's now
putting on a show for the old folks,

cutting the motor in a free fall,
buzzing the telephone pole.

Stock-still they stood
in their yards

looking upward,
shading their eyes from the sun,

listening to the plane's drone
long after its Sunday afternoon ritual was done

and it had flown out of sight
over the hills towards home.

• • •

The dots on the ground elongate themselves
in quicksilver motions, pointing to the sky,

their bird-like mouths reaching for his golden glory
(they're on country ground; they can't rise).

One of these days he'll kill himself
without the thrill of white lightning, planes, and such—

he'll die like all of us,
without a fuss.

Come and rest, orange bird.
Come and shelter yourself.

Photo by Celia Miles

Opening the Door

Julie Thompson

It was a typical registration day at Blue Ridge Community College . . . blue sky with just a hint of fall in the air, masses of people bustling about with a thousand different questions. I was in my usual registration duty station—the lobby of the Patton Building. My role as "registration traffic cop" was to direct people into the appropriate line or to the appropriate building. I was bombarded with questions. "Where's the bookstore? What do I do after I get an advisor's signature? Where is the placement test being given? Who do I see for financial aid? Where do I register? Can you tell me where the restroom is? What if I can't pay today? Would you hold my baby while I talk with my advisor?"

As the morning wore on and the crowds situated into the appropriate lines, the lobby, although still crowded, was no longer massed with people. It was then that I noticed him, an older man in his sixties—a farmer, I guessed—his face tanned and weathered. He wore bib overalls, a faded plaid shirt, and work boots. He was a large man, over six feet tall with huge, rough hands. He could have commanded quite a striking presence, but it was evident he was uncomfortable in this situation. He fidgeted in a corner of the lobby, sometimes sitting on a bench, sometimes standing and pacing. I assumed he was a parent or grandparent of one of the students registering for classes. I noticed him watching me from across the lobby, but when I tried to maintain eye contact, he would look away.

When the crowds thinned enough for me to leave the registration table, I walked over to him and asked if I could help. He flushed, looked away nervously as if he wanted to run, then turned to me. I will never forget that moment or his eyes—piercing blue, full of fear and embarrassment yet dignified. "Is this where you go to learn to read?" he asked.

All of the registration chaos seemed to disappear. It was just the two of us, eye to eye, soul to soul. I took his large hand with both of mine, shook it, and tried to convey with my eyes the admiration I felt for him. "Yes, sir," I said, "you have definitely come to the right place." I left my registration post, took him back to my office, and arranged for an appointment with a member of the Literacy Council. I don't know what happened to the old gentleman, whether or not he learned to read. I can't even remember his name. But I'll never forget him or that moment.

It made me realize how very difficult and *courageous* it is for someone to admit a weakness, seek help in overcoming it, and in doing so, open up a whole new world. It also made me proud to work for a community college whose purpose is to serve the educational needs of the people in its community, no matter where they need to begin.

Auntie

Nancy Dillingham

The summer that Daddy moved them in, everybody said that he shouldn't allow Auntie (she was no one's aunt; yet everyone called her that) and her son to live in the bottom in the little house. (Daddy let them live there, rent free, in return for the son's help on the farm.) Furthermore, they said, Mother shouldn't let us children be around them because it was rumored that the son had had TB since he now began every sentence by clearing his throat. Uh-hem, he would begin, and then he would finish what he was saying.

Auntie was said to be a witch, and most of the children were afraid of her. She did look like one with the myriad of wrinkles on her aged face and a huge, brown, soft-looking mole on the side of her somewhat hooked nose with its flat, flaring nostrils. But we were only slightly afraid of her, and when she walked, or rather hobbled, by our house in her shapeless dress of an indeterminate gray, which reached down to her swollen, misshapen ankles and which was covered with three or four faded-out aprons, we followed at a distance, companionably silent.

The only person Auntie visited was my aunt who would talk to anyone, she was so lonesome. She and Auntie would sit under the large shade tree by the side of the house and dip snuff. (Auntie taught us how to make a brush—she used hers for dipping; we used ours for brushing our teeth or for "dipping" cocoa and sugar from a lid. First, you cut off a piece of birch, take a sharp knife and cut up through the peeled part like you would an onion you were going to dice. Finally, you chew this end until it is soft.)

Snuff came in glasses that were later reused for putting up jelly or drinking milk. Most of the womenfolk who dipped took out small amounts and carried it, for convenience, in little tins in their bosoms or aprons. Auntie and my aunt would take out these containers, tapping on the top all the way around to dislodge the powder from the lids so as not to spill it when they opened it up. After opening the tin carefully, they took the birch brush, softened it with spittle, and swabbed it in the snuff. When the brush was thinly coated, they placed it into the sides of their mouths—in Auntie's case, between the gap in the front of her mouth where several teeth were missing. Sometimes, if they didn't have a birch brush, they would use a little spoon for dipping, heaping it up, then placing its contents in the lower lip so that the lip protruded like it was swollen, their bottom teeth filling with the amber juice. Then they would put the lid back on, snap the tin shut, and slip it back into their bosoms or their aprons, sit back in their rockers, cross their legs, and talk and spit and dip.

Auntie could cross her legs and still place both feet on the ground, a feat we had never seen accomplished before. When she crossed her legs, we could sometimes see her cotton stockings knotted just below the knee. Both she and my aunt were superstitious, and they often enthralled us with stories of people dying after a rooster crowed at sunset or about someone being chased off the mountain by a racer black snake that suspended itself in the air like a wave or about someone's cow giving bloody milk after they stepped on a grand-daddy.

As I said, we were a little bit afraid of Auntie, yet curiously drawn to her somehow. She taught us a chant that could make doodle bugs come out of the dirt mounds:

"Doodle bug, doodle bug,
come up, come up;
your house is on fire,
and your children all burning up."

Twice that summer we went through the bottom to the small shack where she lived. Once we sat on the stoop with her in the sun, listening to her talk in her rather coarse, flat voice. We never talked. Once she took us inside, although we had been forbidden to go any further than the door when we went with messages for the son about work that needed to be done—kindling split or tobacco plants pulled. Since it was summer, the fire was out in the fireplace, but a black pot sat to the side on the hearth still steaming, smelling of soup beans. There were only two rooms in the shack—a small kitchen and a living room crammed with two small, iron beds and boxes stacked everywhere. From under one of the beds, she pulled an ancient, black trunk with tarnished hinges. She opened it up, and it was filled with mementos—a black, cut-glass necklace; a pink satin sachet pillow with an empty, fancy perfume bottle; the wooden leg of her other son who had lost a leg in the Second World War; letters and postcards. He went to all them "furrin" countries, she said as she held up a scalloped postcard with a picture of a huge tower. I felt like I had been transported to an exotic place. It was the same sensation I later experienced when I saw the film version of *Treasure Island* in the little dusty-green audiovisual room at grammar school. I can still see the opening scene where the little boy comes up a windy, winding trail to the tavern, lifts the knocker, and bangs on the door. From that moment on, a strange, mysterious world opens up. I can still see the sinister way the pirate sliced up an apple and feel the rocking of the ship and the creaking of the wood as they stepped aboard and hear the coarse croaking of the parrot with the shiny, green feathers as it perched on the pirate's shoulder.

That was the last time I saw Auntie. I heard Daddy and Mother talking conspiratorially in the kitchen one day. The next night we awoke to a huge fire burning in the bottom. The shack was ablaze. For a moment, before I was fully awake, the fiery light through the bedroom window startled and frightened me so much that I thought it was the "end of time" that I had heard so much about from the pulpit of our church during Sunday preaching and revivals or tent meetings. *Fire and brimstone shall destroy the earth* reverberated through my head, and I shook all over as I stood, a few minutes later, with my parents and sisters in front of our picture window and watched the fire shoot upward in great orange balls. I was horrified thinking that Auntie and her son had indeed been taken up in a great cloud of fire. Daddy didn't seem particularly worried and tried to reassure me. I was puzzled, for I had seen the horseplay and wisecracking and easy camaraderie between my father and the son.

The next day I was all prepared to see the bones or skeletons of Auntie and her son in the smoldering rubble. We poked gingerly in the remains of the shack with tobacco sticks, but all we could find was a piece of melted glass. I wondered if this was Auntie's empty perfume bottle. I imagined the flames licking the letters and postcards, and I mourned Auntie's loss.

After we questioned her and bothered her so much for answers, Mother finally told my sisters and me later that people in the community had threatened to burn the shack and its contents because they constituted a health hazard if Daddy didn't move Auntie and her son away. When he could take it no longer, Daddy had finally given in. He had secretly and quietly moved Auntie and her son in the middle of the night the day before he, himself, had set the shack on fire.

For several months after that, gossip and rumors were rampant. Whenever they could, people would corner my sisters and me—in the churchyard, at the store, at the little post office down the road—and try to question us about Auntie. We told them that on the night of the fire we had watched her and her son ascend into heaven in a cloud of fire. They looked askance at us and went away, mumbling or shaking their heads. Soon word was out that Auntie had cast a spell on us, that we were now "tetched," wild children that other children should stay away from. But all the children loved our stories, and we often laughed under the covers at night as we compared the tall tales we had concocted that day.

We didn't ask where Daddy had taken Auntie, but some time later as we were looking at the suckers and fireballs and jawbreakers in the glass containers lined up on the cabinet of the store, one of our neighbors came in looking like he had seen a ghost. He was white and shaken, and his voice was hoarse and queer as he told the storekeeper that he had just seen Auntie or her spirit walking up the road on the way to town. She looked hardly changed at all, he said, except that she had a red rag tied on her head, probably to cover the baldness where the fire had singed off her hair. We came up behind him then, thrusting our pennies out to the storekeeper. He took them hurriedly and put our choices in a little brown paper bag. They both stared at us like we were prophets like Jeremiah or Obadiah or something. We walked solemnly out of the store, very dignified, the screen door that read in orange letters "Colonial is Good Bread" banging behind us. Not until we were out of sight up the road did we double up with laughter.

For the rest of the summer, we had a field day with that story, embellishing it at every opportunity, creating imaginary meetings between Auntie and other members of the community. We were particularly graphic when recounting her vision of the Gates of Hell.

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Slingshot

Julia Nunnally Duncan

He may have scared other children from his yard,
thrown rocks at their dogs,
and threatened to call the pound.
He might have summoned the law on his neighbors
for allowing a tree limb to fall on his land
or chickens to wander into his garden—
this may all be true.
But for me he made a slingshot,
cut the fork of a laurel tree,
whittled notches with cigarette-stained fingers,
attached strips of rubber, an old shoe tongue,
and sat with me in his porch swing
to show me how to aim it.

For me he told tales of fishing
in the Catawba River
and fried catfish that he'd caught,
inviting me to sit at his table
with him and his wife.

Yet I still hear stories of his meanness,
ill will toward neighbors,
so hard for them to understand
of a Baptist deacon.

But in my mind I see
him grin sidewise at me,
pretending to pull a nickel from my ear
or crack a flea—*click*—
between his thumbnail and fingernail
and then pinch my ear lobe
—gently—
for good measure.

Insight

Parker Lewis

There is a place in a very lonely part of the world that has left such an impression on me that I sincerely doubt I will ever be able to forget it. Up a ribbon of highway in the heart of the Great Plains, where hills of brown grass resemble the waves on an ocean, an unusual visionary by the name of Theodore Roosevelt designated thousands of acres of beautiful tall-grass prairie land so that anyone who found himself drawn to a perfectly unique landscape such as this one could see the splendor of unspoiled prairie, prairie as it must have looked for thousands of years before the European plow turned the vast American grasslands into breadbaskets.

Situated due north of the Black Hills of South Dakota and almost directly to the east of Yellowstone National Park, the Theodore Roosevelt National Park is located in northwestern North Dakota. It is part of a much larger tract of federally designated land known as the Little Missouri National Grassland. Known colloquially as the Upper Badlands for its similarities to the park in South Dakota, it is a visually stunning piece of landscape sitting directly in the middle of what seems, to the unaccustomed traveler, like a million miles of grass and barbed wire.

To me, an East Coast native who had driven two thousand miles to escape the confusion of constant traffic and people, the park was an entirely different world. I had been two weeks in getting there, living out of my truck and trying to find a way to make a life out of travel. I was not expecting much, a place to pitch my tent and dry some clothes while on my way to Montana, so my decision to backpack alone was made spontaneously, which is one of the reasons it turned out to be an amazing experience. I spent two days, not a very long time by most standards, yet the experience I had was so surprising that I could not have packed its intensity into two weeks of backpacking.

Because backpacking usually requires a great deal of planning and organization, the spontaneity of my decision was a factor in the uniqueness of my experience. With little consideration for organization, I gathered the little bit of food I had—coffee, some oatmeal, peanut butter, and bagels—threw in a change of clothes, and some rain gear, and walked away from picnic tables and parking lots in the late afternoon of a beautiful September day.

After fording the Little Missouri River and wading through the bushes that clog its banks, I left the yellowing cottonwoods and sandy river-bottom soil and began to climb. As I hiked up a series of switchbacks, the landscape changed into scrubby oak trees, waist-high prairie grass, and small rock outcroppings. After three hours, the darkening and threatening sky forced me to make camp on a knoll that was at least fifteen hundred feet above the river I had forded earlier.

After pitching my tent, I set out to take in my surroundings while I had enough daylight to see. Across the muddy river, which resembled a giant, mythical serpent, was a thousand-foot rock face colored in bands of pastel pinks, reds, and oranges. Above me a sunset exploded. The thunderheads, which had rolled in seemingly from nowhere, sectioned out the great mass of yellow and orange, their presence heightening the violent color bursts of the disappearing sun. It felt as if God was dabbling on a giant, cosmic canvas, and I was the only one lucky enough to witness it.

As I settled into the course, scratchy grass, coyotes were sounding off to one another, calling mournful warnings, or greetings, or perhaps just reassuring themselves that they were not alone. I had no such reassurance; I had left alone and had encountered no others. In front of my

tent a herd of mule deer casually plodded along, raising their heads from the grass only to look at me with mild curiosity. I could smell rain in the wind that was picking up from the approaching storm, and the aroma of juniper and sagebrush floated around me.

The sun's explosion played itself out, and the sky began to resemble an inverted black bowl pricked with ten million pinholes of light. I was overcome with the beauty all around me. The fact that every day ends as spectacularly as this day had ended was an almost overwhelming revelation to me.

Though I was all alone that evening, I was not lonely, and though I had not eaten all day, I felt fully nourished. That evening I came to the realization that beauty, even the extraordinary beauty that I had just witnessed, is everywhere and happening all the time. There often is effort in noticing, but the result is always greater than the effort expended.

Ironically, a short, unplanned trip wound up having a more profound effect on me than any other. The trips into the wilderness I have taken since that night in North Dakota have been colored with my newfound sensibility, and therefore have been spectacular, but because it was on that particular evening that I gained insight, nothing I have done has compared equally.

Drawing by Cheryl Andrews

Shades

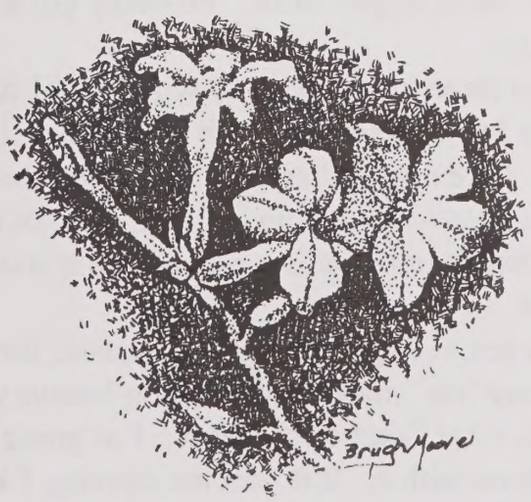
James Hutcherson

What color shall I choose today?
These eyes they need a change.
So tired of seeing colored shades,
Just want them all the same.

I'm sure a surgeon handles this,
My Blue Cross card he spies.
Please take these vague irregularities,
and give me two more eyes.

Not these they're too rose colored,
Not those don't need the blues.
Don't need no pastel pinks and greens,
And those, way too obtuse.

Don't tell me there're no clear-cut views.
Politicians say it's so.
So if Bob and Newt do get to see,
I sure want mine also.



Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

The Dog

Cheryl Andrews

That damn dog. I hate that dog. Yap, yap, yap. Just brainless, mindless barking. Not even real barking, but a shrill, penetrating *yap*. Like short, sharp nails being driven directly into my skull. It has a pattern, repeated over and over, like Morse code. Yap, yap, yap . . . yap, yap . . . yap, yap, yap. Isn't that S.O.S.? If it doesn't shut up, it's going to *need* S.O.S. It's 2:44 in the morning, and the neighborhood is dead quiet except for that damn dog. There can't possibly be anything out there to bark *at*. And why does it have to get under *my* bedroom window to yap? All night, every night. Ever since they moved in a week ago. Why can't they hear it? I'm going crazy from sleep deprivation and endless torture, and they're undoubtedly sleeping like babies. Then again, I have seen neither hide nor hair of them since that first day. It's like they just moved in psychodog and a little furniture and left town.

The first time I saw the dog, I almost laughed. It has to be just about the ugliest dog in the world. Only about a foot high, and a sickly cream color, like curdled milk. It's almost bald, with little sprigs of hair sticking out at random, like some insane barber had got hold of it. You think it might have been kind of cute at one time? Like Benji cute? Naw, not a chance, that dog has *always* been ugly. Makes you wonder what those people were thinking to take something like that into their home. It had to have been a gift from a hateful mother-in-law with a sick sense of humor. That must be why they put it out at night; they hate it too. They can't give it away—no one would voluntarily take that beast—but since there is no fence, maybe it would conveniently wander away. "Aw, sorry Mom. Honestly, I don't know what happened, he just disappeared."

Yeah.

You'd think it would get hoarse, or at least bored, with that monotonous, mechanical, repetitive yapping, like a wind-up toy from hell. If it was a real bark, I think I could stand it better. I was raised around dogs—real dogs who could do what dogs were meant to do, like hunting, herding or stopping a burglar—and they only barked when it was necessary. If one of them barked, you knew there was a good reason. And it was the kind of bark that would *scare* a burglar—not just irritate him.

Yap, yap, yap. It doesn't even take a breath. How can it keep that up? There is nothing normal about a dog like that. It must be psychotic. Probably got a look at itself in a mirror one day. Drove it right over the edge.

3:10. I have to get up in three hours to go to work, and I haven't slept yet. I have to do *something*. The first few nights I tried screaming at it to shut up. It even worked for a while. Screaming seemed to startle it. Like no one had ever told it to "shut up" before. Not likely, but maybe they didn't say it with as much *enthusiasm* as I did. It didn't entirely stop the yapping, but it did slow it down enough so that I could get in a nap before it started up again. Now, no amount of yelling has any effect.

I've always been taught not to nag at a dog. One quick, firm correction is more effective than constant nagging. If you say "no," make sure the dog knows you mean "no!" Ookaay. It's about time this dog understands what "shut up!" means. I'm going out there and teach that dog one quick, firm lesson and be done with it. If it sees me coming, I know it'll run off for a while, but that's not enough—the damn thing will just come right back. But maybe if I'm careful, I can go out the back door and slip around from behind and scare the yap right out of it.

Where are my shoes? I need to turn on a light, but I don't want to give it any warning. If I can sneak up on it and scream right into its ratty little ear, I might be able to scare it off long enough for me to get some sleep. I'm wasting time fumbling around in the dark—forget the shoes, never mind the robe; it's time to get this over with.

Man, it's dark out here. Around the corner . . . remember the rose bush—give that plenty of room. I can't see the dog but I can hear it just fine. It's still yapping. Good. It's totally unaware that I'm out here. *Damn!* That hurts! I stubbed my toe on the only rock in the whole yard. Not a big rock, just big enough nearly to break my toe. Hmm. Just big enough. Nice and round, about the size of my fist, about two pounds. Perfect! Even better than my original plan. If I can throw this rock close enough, I should be able to scare that yappy little monster into the next neighborhood. I'll have to throw it hard. I don't want just to spook this dumb dog a little bit and give it something to *really* bark at.

Concentrate . . . . Aim for the yap . . . . Wind her up, and let her go! SHUT UP! Yapyap*thunk!* Yike! All right! Perfect shot! That had to have hit the ground within an inch of its ugly little nose. That dog won't stop running 'til it gets to Nebraska! I'll bet next time I yell SHUT UP, that dog's legs will start running before its ears finish hearing!

Silence. Ahh yes. I can hear my bed a-calling.

Luxurious! Wonderful! This bed has never felt so comfortable. Five minutes without a sound. I never thought pure silence could feel so peaceful. And I never realized what a good pitcher I could be (given the proper inspiration). I should try out for the majors. That pitch was as close to perfect as anyone could get. And the sound of that *thunk!* and that simultaneous *Yike!* was so satisfying.

That rock probably even skinned its little nose. Oh no. Surely I didn't actually *hit* the dog. I'm not *that* good a shot. I *couldn't* have gotten that close. But that was a pretty big rock. And I did throw it about as hard as I could . . . .

Geez! I probably killed it. I've never hurt anything in my life. Now I'll go to hell for sure, and that ratty little dog will be there to torture me through eternity.

4:00. It's so quiet. Not a sound. *Dead silence*.

Now I won't sleep for worrying about that damn dog. God, I hate that dog!

Survival

Nancy Dillingham

Like the spring
choosing its own time to reappear
I struggle to rise.

(False starts are nothing new to me.)

Climbing out from under the wintery weight
of a white March morning
I search for reasons.

After seasons of false springs and lies—
and more than one snowy surprise—
I contemplate the trees
folding out their tender hearts

and I, at last, get my start.

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

Luminescence of Life

Gabrielle Thompson

The flashlight cast a pale path along the old logging road we followed. Leaves crunched under our boots. Unbidden, snakes entered my thoughts. As a city girl/island woman, now mountain transplant, I was not totally comfortable with the forest on such a dark night. No, I decided, snakes would not be here to mar our journey. It was mid-May, and a cool fifty degrees. These were part of the ideal conditions for our quest. We had specific directions: during the two middle weeks of May, on a clear, still, windless night, with a temperature of fifty to fifty-five degrees, before the moon rise and between 9:00-11:00 pm, we were to walk into deep, wet woods to acquaint ourselves with a touch of mountain magic. These were the requirements for connecting with the fairies of Appalachia.

The previous July, when we moved from the Virgin Islands to Western North Carolina, I had met Clyde Hollifield at a dinner party. When he spoke of fairies, I thought he was spinning one of his many tales. He had been a puppet master and storyteller for many years and had performed for President Carter at the White House. Now he was a welding instructor at McDowell Technical Community College in Marion, North Carolina. He was also working on a comprehensive storybook about fairies, detailing their lives in drawings and text. With smiling eyes, Clyde told us we could see them ourselves if we followed the aforementioned conditions. Then he said the words that caught me hook, line, and sinker. He said fairies were luminous, and they danced together through the trees in glowing ribbons of light. Having spent a great deal of my life on the sea, I knew the *magic* of things *that glow in the dark*.

As a child in suburban Los Angeles, I was nature-starved. However, in Los Angeles I discovered the beauty of phosphorescence on an ink-black night. It is one of life's most magical experiences. I was twelve when I had my first encounter with luminosity. My father took me to Malibu to see the red tide light up the California coastline. As waves curled gently, a blue fire burst within the foam, rendering the top of the wave translucent. A few fish, corpulent from bloating, dotted the sand. Even their stench could not diminish the joy I felt in seeing this eerie, blue-green glow. Father told me how the microorganisms normally lived without ill-effect in the ocean. However, under certain conditions, they procreated in massive numbers, turning the sea red and toxic with their increased volume. At night when there was no moon to diminish their incandescence, they were agitated by the action of the waves rising to meet the shore, creating a phosphorescent release of energy.

Three years later, we witnessed a red tide combined with a major Pacific storm. We drove to the "Pipeline," an area where waves formed a wall of water with a wave curl that surfers could ride through, or "shoot." On this night, a thirty-foot-high, brilliant neon-green fire-tube raced through the black night to thunder on the shore, shooting Roman candles of blue-green star dust ten feet into the air as its force collided with the sand's edge. People were romping on the damp sand, racing forward as the waves retreated, kicking sand high into the air, and sending light showering from the falling sand. It resembled a pagan ritual, a Beltane fire: everyone was in a frenzy of joy and laughter as they twirled and played in such magnificence. I looked closely at the wet sand as the water retreated. A million stars twinkled where the organisms burned in their night of splendor. Overhead, the stars mirrored the image. As the sea stole the sand from beneath my feet, my balance shifted. For one moment I felt swept into the fire of creation. A

seagull, cawing, flew into my vision. It glowed nebulously where ocean spray had painted its feathers. Frances Hodgson Burnett's explanation of magic in *The Secret Garden* reverberated in my mind: *Everything is made out of Magic, leaves and trees, flowers and birds, badgers and foxes and squirrels and people. So it must be all around us. In this garden—in all the places* . . . . For me, this night was filled with magic.

More magic awaited. I met my husband, Edward, while I was in college. He was a Navy lieutenant with a dream to build a seventy-five-foot schooner. We did so and sailed to the Virgin Islands. On our voyage to the islands, we encountered luminescent life even in the deepest ocean. Two hundred miles off the coast of Mexico, we were surrounded by "glow worms," spirals of light that would blink on, twirl, and fade like shiny silver dollars on the calm black sea. Later, we were told it was a mating ritual for a worm-like organism and only occurred once a year.

In the Virgin Islands, we found a cove in the mangroves of Hurricane Hole, St. John, that glowed with phosphorescence much of the year. Here, in briny, fecund waters that were always still, our dinghy's propeller would stir up a light show for our charter guests. Fish shot through the shallows like tracer bullets, their paths blazing for minutes after their passage. After seeing this display, one of our guests dove over the side of the schooner. Her butterfly stroke created a metamorphosis from human to angel.

I told Clyde of these experiences. He told me about lightning bugs, striking crystals, fox fire, the Brown Mountain Lights, and the fairies. My seven-year-old daughter and I had already trapped fireflies to study in her bug barn. Their blinking, airborne radiance was a new experience for us both. We watched their internal burning with awe before releasing them back to the night. Clyde showed us how we could re-create that flash of blue-green emission by striking two large, clear quartz crystals together. The spark burst forth in the darkness, releasing green light inches in front of the crystals.

The Brown Mountain Lights, Clyde explained, were occasionally seen on summer nights from Wiseman's Peak near the Linville Wilderness area. The lights remain stationary for hours at a time--and disappear in the blink of an eye. Alien spacecraft, reflections from distant cities, car or train headlights, and even a ghost carrying a lantern have all been suggested as possible explanations. Clyde's supposition is some sort of electromagnetic occurrence. He said the lights were elusive and difficult to experience, but the fairies appeared every year in mid-May.

Later that first summer, we were lucky enough to find fox fire. Ed had mowed over a stump, causing the rotting wood to effloresce. We were dumbfounded by the amount of illumination it produced and gathered chunks to shine by our bedside that night.

However, we had to wait until spring for our fairy trek. Rain hampered the first few nights of the new moon. When I arrived home from my job at the library the next night, I called Ed to join me with a flashlight.

We caught ourselves whispering as we went deeper into the woods. Suddenly, in the canopy of darkness to my right, I glimpsed movement. I signaled Ed to shut off the light. Ahead, in pitch black, we saw a tiny glow through the trees. It was continuous, but it was too far in the undergrowth for us to attempt to reach it. We turned on the light and moved quickly to where the creek flows along the old road—deep into the wet woods.

Two creeks converge and flow under the road. As we shut off the flashlight, rivers of green neon followed along the banks . . . minuscule pinpoints joining together into flowing cascades of unblinking luminosity. Each stream of light flowed two feet above the ground, moving *upstream*. My heartbeat quickened as I watched the cable of green rise and fall with the

curvature of the land. I reached toward the light. It gently moved away, keeping the same clearance from my hand as it did from the ground. Ed turned on the light; no explanation could be seen. We continued to try to "catch" the luminescence. But, like a specter, it veered into nothingness.

We spent over an hour on our fairy hunt. Finally, we were able to trap one of the small beings. It was much smaller than a grain of rice. Under its wings, its body was luminiferous. It did not blink like a firefly, but glowed with constant splendor. Knowing it was an insect did not lessen its magic for us. I count my blessings that, in all the places I have lived, nature has provided a show to brighten the darkness. And this summer, I may have to try to see those Brown Mountain Lights.

Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore

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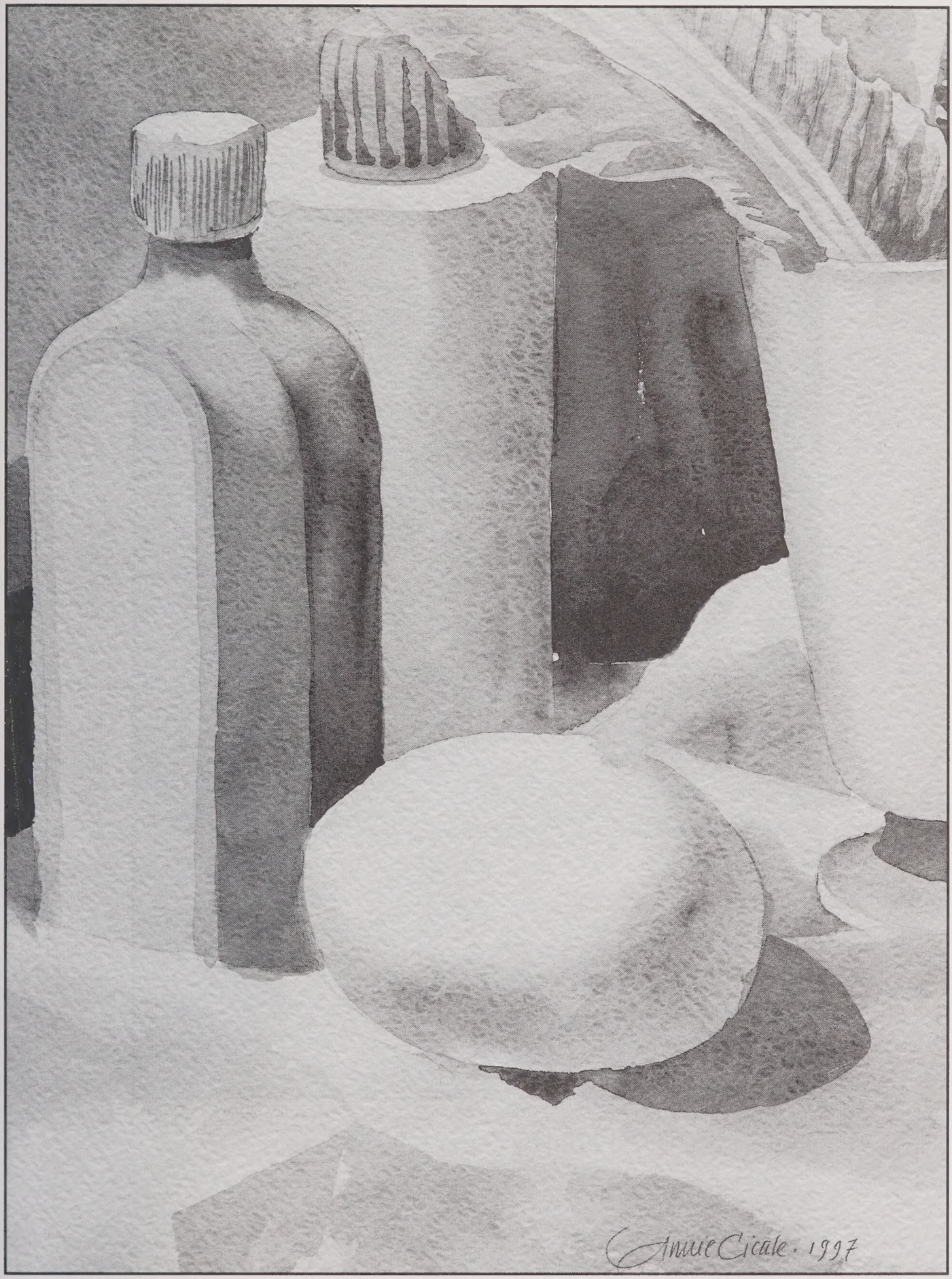


Watercolor by Annie Cicale

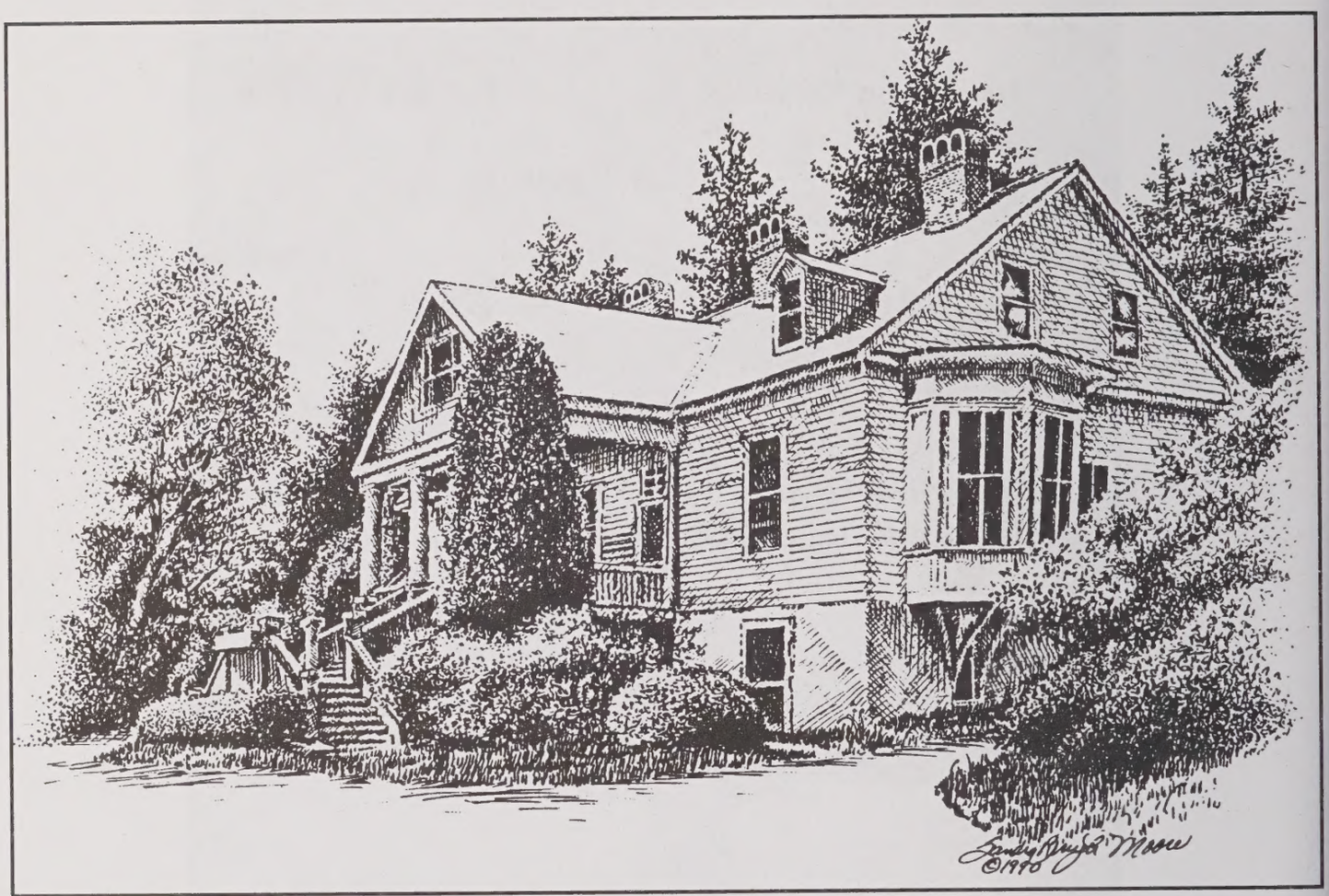
Photo by Peggy Higgins

This issue of *Victoria Press* is dedicated to the memory of

Arleen Bryan

Life is a pure flame, and we live by an invisible sun within us.

Sir Thomas Browne



Drawing by Sandra Brugh Moore